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**THE U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY POLICY:
PROSPECTS FOR THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

by

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December 2006

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PROSPECTS FOR THE U.S.-ROK ALLIANCE**

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ABSTRACT

The U.S.-ROK alliance has been a vital element for South Korea's security since the end of the Korean War. By successfully serving its primary role in deterring a North Korean reinvasion of the South, the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) was the core within the alliance. Since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States, it began to transform the structure of U.S. forces overseas under the Military Transformation plan. In this context, the USFK is undergoing an unprecedented transformation process. With the United States and South Korea's recent agreement on the strategic flexibility of USFK, it became obvious that the primary role of the USFK will be changed from North Korean deterrence to a regional contingency force. This thesis assesses the implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security. It discusses how the U.S. strategic flexibility will influence the security circumstances surrounding the Korean peninsula and how it could change the U.S.-ROK alliance. The U.S.-Japan alliance transformation and the realignment of USFJ is assessed as a case study. Finally, based on the four criteria which are determined as the essential elements in South Korean security, South Korea's policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy are assessed.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
B.	PURPOSE.....	2
C.	IMPORTANCE.....	3
D.	LITERATURE REVIEW	4
E.	MAJOR QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENTS.....	7
F.	METHODOLOGY	9
G.	ORGANIZATION	11
II.	WHAT IS THE U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY POLICY?	13
A.	STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY WITHIN U.S. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY POLICY	14
1.	Strategic Flexibility in the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2001 and Global Defense Posture Review (GPR)	16
B.	DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY WITHIN THE U.S.-ROK SECURITY RELATIONSHIP.....	21
C.	U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY POLICY AND REALIGNMENT OF USFK	26
1.	Troop Reduction	27
2.	Base Relocation	27
3.	Changing Force Structure.....	28
4.	Transferring Missions	29
5.	Transferring Wartime Operational Command and Control.....	30
D.	THE STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY OF THE USFK.....	31
III.	THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA	35
A.	DEVELOPMENT OF THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE	36
B.	THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION	39
1.	The U.S.-Japan Alliance in the 21 st Century	39
2.	Transforming the U.S.-Japan Alliance	42
3.	Realignment of the USFJ.....	45
C.	JAPAN'S REACTION TO THE TRANSFORMATION	47
D.	IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA	52
IV.	THE IMPLICATIONS OF U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY FOR SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY	57
A.	PERSPECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL ACTORS.....	58
1.	China	59
2.	North Korea.....	60
3.	Japan	61
B.	STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY AND SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY: FOUR CRITICAL ASPECTS	63
1.	U.S.-ROK Regional Security Alliance.....	63

2.	Will Strategic Flexibility Weaken North Korean Deterrence?.....	65
3.	Involvement in a Potential U.S.-China Conflict in the Taiwan Strait.....	69
4.	Can Strategic Flexibility Cause an Arms Race?	72
C.	GAPS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND SOUTH KOREA.....	73
1.	Diverging Perspectives on Regional Actors.....	74
a.	<i>North Korea</i>	75
b.	<i>China</i>	76
c.	<i>Japan</i>	77
2.	Differences on Rationales and Visions of the Alliance	80
V.	SOUTH KOREA'S POLICY OPTIONS TO U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY	83
A.	FOUR ESSENTIAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOUTH KOREAN POLICY DECISION MAKING.....	85
1.	The U.S.-ROK Alliance	85
2.	Inter-Korean Relations.....	87
3.	Self-Reliant Defense.....	89
4.	Relationship with China and Japan	91
B.	SOUTH KOREA'S POLICY OPTIONS.....	92
1.	Active Support Policy	93
2.	Constraint Policy.....	95
3.	Status Quo with Strategic Ambiguities	98
C.	POLICY RECOMMENDATION	101
VI.	CONCLUSION	105
	LIST OF REFERENCES	111
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	121

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	South Korea's Policy Options and Implications	100
Table 2.	South Korea's Policy Preferences.....	101

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. INTRODUCTION

The United States has greatly influenced Northeast Asia since the end of World War II. For South Korea, it is impossible to talk about the last fifty years of history without emphasizing its relationship with the United States. Since 1953, when the United States and South Korea agreed upon the Mutual Defense Treaty, there have been only minor changes to the role of the United States Forces in Korea (USFK)¹. The end of the Cold War introduced new phases to the relationships among states in this region. However, due to the threat of North Korea,² the United States and Republic of Korea (U.S.-ROK) alliance has not changed much and the role of the USFK has also been maintained. In the beginning of the 21st century, the U.S.-ROK alliance encountered a major turning point. An historic Pyongyang summit between two Korean leaders in June 2000 and persistent efforts of the “Sunshine Policy”³ toward the North during South Korea’s Kim Dae-Jung administration rapidly changed the inter-Korean relationship. Meanwhile, since the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, the United States has initiated a defense transformation process and a Global Defense Posture Review (GPR) of its forces abroad.

During 2003-2004, the United States and South Korea began consultations on the transformation of USFK under a series of Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative (FOTA) talks⁴ and agreed upon the basic plan of the USFK realignment. In this context, the United States and South Korean governments on January 19, 2006 launched the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP) plan and made an agreement upon “strategic

¹ Although the number of U.S. forces in Korea has been consistently reduced since the 1950s, the force structure and the role of USFK have not been changed since then.

² In 1989, the Nunn-Warner Amendment called for a three phased reduction plan, but it was placed on hold after about 3,000 troops were withdrawn, mainly due to the North Korean nuclear crisis in 1992~1994.

³ For background on Sunshine Policy, see: Chung-In Moon and David I. Steinberg, eds., *Kim Dae-Jung Government and Sunshine Policy: Promises and Challenges* (Washington, DC and Seoul: Georgetown UP and Yonsei UP, 1999).

⁴ Details of the FOTA talks will be discussed in Chapter II.

flexibility.”⁵ The term “strategic flexibility” first appeared publicly in the 2003 35th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) Joint Communiqué. The basic idea of strategic flexibility is that it permits the United States to relocate its troops stationed in South Korea to other parts of the world where the United States faces conflicts.

With the decision to reduce USFK by 12,500-men and the overall realignment of USFK,⁶ the agreement of strategic flexibility brought about huge public debates within South Korean society. Many South Koreans disagree with the idea of strategic flexibility, simply arguing that it implicates the unnecessary involvement of South Korea in a potential conflict between the United States and China. Moreover, a number of South Koreans perceive that the U.S. strategic policy reflects the United States’ discomfort on South Korea’s recent anti-American sentiment and difference on North Korean policy. Along with other related problematic issues between the two allies such as relocating the Yong-san base, revision of the Status of the Forces Agreement (SOFA) and recovering wartime Operational Command and Control (OPCON), the agreement of USFK’s strategic flexibility is causing more trouble in the U.S.-ROK alliance.

B. PURPOSE

This thesis argues that despite the controversies on the implementation of USFK’s strategic flexibility policy, it will eventually play a critical part in the security of South Korea as well as in the future U.S.-ROK alliance. Therefore, the main purpose of the thesis is to identify the implications of U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security and analyze South Korea’s policy options toward this U.S. strategic flexibility policy. In this context, examining the development of the strategic flexibility concept within U.S. international security policy since the end of the Cold War and a comparative case study on current U.S.-Japan force realignment⁷ will give better understanding of the nature of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy and its implications in the region. Moreover, through assessing four critical aspects of U.S. strategic flexibility policy regarding South

⁵ Launching ministerial level talk regarding strategic flexibility of USFK was agreed upon by the presidents of both countries during the Gyung-ju Summit in November 2005. The joint statement was made by the U.S. Secretary of State Rice and South Korea Foreign Minister Ban.

⁶ In October 2004, the U.S. and South Korea agreed to a phased withdrawal of 12,500 U.S. troops in South Korea by end of the 2008. Initially the 3600-man force of the 2nd division in USFK left for Iraq in August 2004.

⁷ In February 2005, the United States and Japan announced the blueprint of the transforming the U.S.-Japan alliance including the realignment of the U.S. forces in Japan.

Korean security and defining both countries' major gaps regarding this issue will not only help solve current problems between two old allies but also will allow better insights on the future security of South Korea.

C. IMPORTANCE

In 2004, trade between the United States and South Korea was over \$70 billion, ranking South Korea as the 7th largest trading partner to the United States and the United States as the 2nd largest to South Korea.⁸ Furthermore, the two governments recently began working on a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)⁹ which would further increase their economic cooperation. Above all, South Korea's economic success and development of democracy in such a short period, after the 36 years of colonial status and three years of devastating war, evidently shows the significance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The U.S.-ROK alliance is also well known for its successful contribution to regional security. It served a major role in regional peace and stability for the last fifty years by deterring the proliferation of communism and also North Korean reinvasion in the peninsula. In this context, the presence of USFK has been always the core in the alliance.¹⁰

There had been several changes to the USFK since it was established after the Korean War. However, those changes were mostly limited to the reduction in troop numbers; the USFK force structure, which was based on deterring the North Korean reinvasion, was never changed. Moreover, since the withdrawal of 20,000 U.S. 7th Infantry Division troops in 1971 (based on the Nixon Doctrine), two other total withdrawal plans initiated by President Carter in 1977 and by the East Asian Strategy Initiative (EASI) in 1990 were both eventually cancelled after the withdrawal of only a couple thousand troops. Thus, since its inception as the U.S. forces in Korea and until now, the USFK invariably maintained itself as a strong deterrent force toward North Korea's threat to South Korea.

The current U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea implies not only its troop reduction but also changing the roles and missions of USFK by transforming its

⁸ CRS Report for Congress, *South Korea-U.S. Economic Relations: Cooperation, Friction, and Prospects for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)* (Washington, DC, 2005).

⁹ United States and South Korea began formal negotiations for an FTA in June 2006.

¹⁰ "USFK, economic value \$14 billion, and contributes to 1.2% of South Korean GDP (Juhanmigun gyunjejeok gachi 140eokbul, hanguk GDP 1.2% giyeo)," *Segeilbo*, May 20, 2004.

overall force structure. Considering the importance of the USFK in the alliance, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will not only change the role of the USFK but it will fundamentally change the alliance itself. Hence, understanding the U.S. strategic flexibility policy and its implications are critically significant to the policy makers in South Korea and also to the students of U.S.-ROK relations. Changes within the U.S.-ROK security alliance are interrelated with the United States and South Korea's respective foreign policies toward the region. Accordingly, this study gives a better view of both countries' interests in the region, in addition to their relationships with other states such as Japan and China. Additionally, studying the implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy in South Korea could offer a practical example to the other U.S. allies in the context of the United States' global defense transformation since September 11, 2001.

D. LITERATURE REVIEW

The agreement about a “strategic flexibility”¹¹ concept by the United States and South Korea last January brought about large debates¹² within South Korean society. Many argue that the agreement about strategic flexibility will not benefit South Korea's national interest, which is in the short term deterring a North Korean threat and in the long term implanting peace in the peninsula. But some, including South Korean government officials, note that the increased strategic flexibility should be an integral

¹¹ Literally the strategic flexibility means that the USFK could be used in other purposes by having “flexibility” in its capacity rather than just defending South Korean from the invasion of North Korea. However, there are much more implications within this policy. Although the term strategic flexibility is only specifically applied to the USFK, the concept of strategic flexibility of the U.S. forces was developed within a broader context. The strategic flexibility policy basically stems from the U.S. National Security Strategy and Global Defense Posture Review which makes up a crucial portion in the Defense Transformation. Therefore the U.S. strategic flexibility policy is not only critical in determining the future of the U.S.-ROK security alliance but also fundamentally related to the U.S. international security policy. More specifics of the “strategic flexibility” will be defined precisely in Chapter II of the thesis.

¹² There are not many current debates among scholars in United States specifically on the USFK's strategic flexibility issue: however, the status and the withdrawal of USFK has been long debated by policymakers and scholars in the United States. For recent studies regarding the debates on the U.S. forces in Korea, see Ted Carpenter and Doug Bandow, *The Korean Conundrum: America's Troubled Relations with North and South Korea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), Selig S. Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002), and Edward A. Olsen, “Why Keep U.S. Forces in Korea?,” *Far Eastern Economic Review* 166, no. 7 (2003): 22.

element of South Korea's own defense strategy. Thus there remains a strict division between two perspectives in light of how strategic flexibility will affect the security of South Korea and also the future of the US-ROK alliance.

The first group of scholars,¹³ who argue that strategic flexibility will not benefit South Korea's national interest, points out the three major disadvantages in the strategic flexibility of the USFK. First, they insist that letting the USFK move out from the Korean peninsula will weaken its capability to deter North Korea's threat. Moreover, frequent in-flow and out-flow of the USFK might arouse military tension on the peninsula and eventually deteriorate inter-Korean relations. The second negative aspect of the strategic flexibility of USFK comes from the possibilities of unnecessary involvement in a potential regional crisis. Considering recent development of the economic relationship with China, South Korea does not want to become entangled in a potential Sino-U.S. conflict over the Taiwan Strait issue. Some even argue that the primary target of the strategic flexibility of USFK is China because the global strategic goal of the United States is to check and blockade China's burgeoning economy that can potentially challenge the U.S. global hegemony in the 21st century.¹⁴ Lastly, this perspective anticipates that in the long term strategic flexibility could increase the U.S. military influence in the region and accelerate military asymmetry between the United States and other countries in Asia. Moreover, it is asserted that in the long run strategic flexibility could precipitate an arms race in the region.¹⁵

The second group of scholars and also some policy makers¹⁶ assess the strategic flexibility agreement more positively. They argue that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy is based on the U.S. National Security Strategy and its global defense reorganizing; thus as an ally sharing the vision with United States, South Korea should accept the policy and

¹³ See Jae-Jung Seo, Chul-Kee Lee, Seong-Ryoul Cho and Young-Dae Koh.

¹⁴ Chul-Kee Lee, "Strategic Flexibility of U.S. Forces in Korea," *Nautilus Policy Forum Online*, no. 06-19A (2006).

¹⁵ Jae-Jung Seo, "Strategic Flexibility of USFK and Peace of Northeast Asia," *Korea National Strategy Institute Special Report*, no. 5 (2005).

¹⁶ See Geun Lee, Sang-Hyun Lee, Kang Choi and Won-Gon Park. Also, some of the U.S. officials such as Victor Cha and Evans Revere expressed their views within this side during the conference on "Prospects for U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula in the Second Bush Administration" hosted by CSIS and Chosunilbo in Washington, DC, May 17-18, 2005.

cope with it. Within this context, the strategic flexibility agreement was unavoidable to South Korea and to some extent it was a successful diplomatic achievement by emphasizing the stipulation "...the U.S. respects the ROK position that it shall not be involved in a regional conflict in Northeast Asia against the will of the Korean people"¹⁷ from the U.S. side. Also, regarding the out-flow of the USFK, which strategic flexibility implies, South Korean government officials and some scholars emphasize that the concept of strategic flexibility is a two-way street, allowing forces to come to Korea from around the globe as well as being able to leave. Moreover, it is argued that the strategic flexibility of the USFK could serve the current government's "self-reliant" defense policy. South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun announced "Cooperative Self-reliant National Defense"¹⁸ at the very beginning of his administration. It is clear that in the near future South Korea will take over more USFK roles¹⁹ and in this context, this group of scholars claims that the strategic flexibility of USFK could positively facilitate South Korea's self-reliant defense capability.

These two perspectives have both strengths and weaknesses within their arguments. The major strength of the negative perspective is that the anxieties of unnecessary involvement and a potential arms race could enable South Korean policy makers to contemplate its relationship with not only the United States but also other regional players on this issue. It renders broader views to South Korea by considering the ripple effect of strategic flexibility in the region. The positive perspective also has some strength in its argument. This perspective lies in the argument that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will eventually contribute to South Korea's security and own defense strategy. Considering the strong security relationships between the two countries, as it has been during the last fifty years since the Korean War, it is important to note that there are mutual benefits within the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. The gaps between the

¹⁷ U.S. Department of the State, *Joint United States-Republic of Korea Statement on the Launch of the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP)*, January 19, 2006 (Washington, DC).

¹⁸ It appeared first in public during a speech on Liberation Day ceremony in August 2003 by President Roh and its basic purpose is to strengthen the role of South Korean military forces to defend the nation.

¹⁹ In FOTA, the United States and South Korea agreed upon South Korean armed forces' taking over the ten major missions of USFK until 2006.

policymakers of the two countries can be reduced through the idea that the strategic flexibility will not undermine the current security of South Korea but rather enhance it by contributing to South Korea's own defense strategy.

However, both perspectives also carry some serious weaknesses in their arguments. The negative perspective's main argument is that the strategic flexibility of USFK will weaken the deterrence capability of the contemporary U.S.-ROK military alliance. This argument is based on the current reduction and repositioning of the USFK. However, reducing and pulling back the U.S. troops from the front line to 75 miles south of the line do not automatically mean the reduction of the deterrence to the North Korean threat. According to the U.S. Global Posture Review (GPR), the United States "focus[es] on capabilities, not numbers;"²⁰ consequently the U.S. government is currently investing \$11 billion to upgrade the capabilities of USFK. Therefore, it can be argued that there is less correlation between strategic flexibility and the weakening of the deterrence capability of USFK.

The positive perspective also has a critical weakness in its assumption. The basic proposition of the positive perspective is that strategic flexibility is two-way street, so it will not only move U.S. forces out of the peninsula but also effectively bring in them in case of contingency in the Korean peninsula. However, this two-way street concept regarding the strategic flexibility is less appealing to South Koreans. As for South Koreans, through the last fifty years of U.S. presence, it was already take for granted that the U.S. forces will be rapidly augmented as soon as North Korea attacks the South, based on the prepared Korean war-plans. Therefore, emphasizing the positive elements of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy through its increasing reinforcement capability to South Korea, does not compensate South Koreans concerns about the U.S. forces performing out of peninsula missions.

E. MAJOR QUESTIONS AND ARGUMENTS

This thesis covers the most debated issues regarding U.S. strategic flexibility: the regional role of USFK, controversies on the deterrence capabilities and involvement in

²⁰ "Transforming the U.S. Global Defense Posture," Speech by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas J. Feith. In the CSIS conference, Washington, DC., December 3, 2003. "...in transforming our posture, we are strengthening our commitment to secure our common interests, even in those places where we may be reducing forces levels."

the Taiwan Strait, and the increased possibility of an arms race in the region. It is necessary to thoroughly examine the implications of these issues for South Korean security. However, it is more important for South Korea to use strategic flexibility to the best advantage of USFK's own security interests. Current debates on strategic flexibility focus mostly on either the negative or positive implications, or fail to explore *how* it could serve South Korea's security goals; in the short term to deter the North Korean threat as well as reduce military tension on the peninsula, and over the long term to achieve self-reliant national defense. Strategic flexibility policy must be evaluated in the context of these short and long term purposes. It is evident that strategic flexibility will change the U.S.-ROK alliance in one way or another, and this thesis is thus focusing on the ways in which the strategic flexibility policy could change the U.S.-ROK alliance, as well as how it can benefit South Korea's goals within the alliance.

There are two key questions to be answered in this thesis. They are: What are the implications of U.S. strategic flexibility for South Korean security? What are South Korea's policy options toward this U.S. policy? In order to answer these key questions, it is necessary to address the following subordinate questions. Answering these subordinate questions consequently reveal the answers to the two main questions of the thesis.

1. What is the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea?
2. How will it influence the Korean peninsula?
3. How will it influence the Northeast Asian region and South Korea's relationship with regional actors?
4. What is the gap between the United States and South Korea regarding this issue?
5. What are the main elements to consider in South Korea's policy options?

The core argument of the thesis is that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will critically influence South Korea's security and also will take a crucial role in changing the U.S.-ROK alliance. Therefore it is significant for South Korea to consider its best policy option toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Most importantly, by expanding the role of USFK from a peninsula force to a regional force, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will pressure the U.S.-ROK alliance to change from the threat-based, peninsula-focused alliance to a more comprehensive regional security alliance. The development of the U.S.-Japan alliance and the USFJ's realignment process clearly shows

the example of a U.S.-led regional security alliance. In this context, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will not only change the status of USFK and the U.S.-ROK alliance, but it will also greatly influence inter-Korean relations as well as South Korea's relationship with China and Japan. As for the regional security environment, it could cause a serious arms race between the major players in the region.

These potential changes should be considered on two levels. Within the peninsula, maintaining deterrence capabilities toward North Korea and achieving a self-reliant defense capability will be the primary concern to South Korea. Within the region, maintaining good relationships with both China and Japan, and dissuading the potential development of an arms race will be also essential. Therefore, South Korea's policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility should carefully consider the following four criteria: the U.S.-ROK alliance, inter-Korean relations, self-reliant defense, and South Korea's relationship with China and Japan.

Considering the above four essential criteria, South Korea's recommended policy toward U.S. strategic flexibility is in the short term to carry out a status quo policy with strategic ambiguities, but over the long term to actively pursue supportive policy. Therefore, the main conclusion of the thesis is that South Korea must recognize the importance of U.S. strategic flexibility for its security, and should actively engage with this policy. In this context, the United States and South Korea must focus on developing compatibility between the U.S. strategic flexibility policy and South Korea's Defense Reform plan, which could contribute to both countries' security interests as well as strengthen the U.S.-ROK alliance.

F. METHODOLOGY

This thesis conducts a case study on the transformation of the U.S.-Japan alliance.²¹ The U.S.-Japan alliance is the most similar form of alliance to the U.S.-ROK alliance, yet it also has many different characteristics. South Korea and Japan share a common "asymmetric" alliance relationship with the United States, with the same mixed feelings of "abandonment" and "entrapment." During the last fifty years, Japan and South Korea

²¹ Tokyo and Washington reached final agreement in May 1, 2006 over a plan to reduce the number of US troops on Japanese soil by transferring 8,000 marines from Okinawa to Guam, and relocate a marine heliport from Futenma to another part of Okinawa by 2014.

were both able to achieve huge economic success and development of democracy under the U.S. security umbrella. However, for the United States, its relationships with South Korea and Japan have rather different roles and objectives, as well as different levels of priority in its security policies. Furthermore, it is evident that both alliances are currently going in quite different directions under the U.S. military transformation. Under the transformation of USFJ, Japan is further strengthening its security relationship with the United States whereas in the same circumstances, South Korea is having difficulties even maintaining its previous strong security relationship with the United States.

In this context, examining Japan's case serves to be the best instrument to understand U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. Considering the geopolitical proximity of the two U.S. forces, comparing the USFK's transformation process with USFJ's gives a better picture of contemporary regional circumstances surrounding this issue. Most of all, in terms of strengthening the alliance relationship with the United States, Japan's reaction to the USFJ realignment and the development of agreements on an overall transformation process allows better insights to South Korea's policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Therefore, this comparative case study of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation focuses on the way in which Japan accepted the U.S. military transformation within its particular situation and what the implications are for South Korean security and also for the U.S.-ROK alliance.

In addition, this thesis performs a policy analysis. Officially, the strategic flexibility of USFK is agreed upon between the United States and South Korea. Nonetheless, this agreement does not provide specific details regarding this issue.²² In this respect, this thesis will offer three policy options based on South Korea's level of acceptance of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. The policy options will be:

1. Active support policy
2. Constraint policy
3. Status quo with strategic ambiguities

²² The agreement only mentioned that each side 'respect' each other's interests and do not have any details on actual implementation or procedures of the USFK's strategic flexibility.

These policy options will be carefully assessed by the four essential criteria which are considered as the most critical factors in South Korean security in this thesis. Four criteria to test South Korea's policy options are:

1. The U.S.-ROK alliance
2. Inter-Korean relations
3. Self-reliant national defense
4. Relationship with China and Japan

These criteria are selected based on the implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security. Through these four criteria, the each policy option will be thoroughly assessed in favor of South Korean security and the best policy option that fulfills the criteria will be recommended.

G. ORGANIZATION

In order to conduct the subsequent analysis, it is critical to understand the nature of the U.S. policy; thus, Chapter II mainly discusses the contextual meaning of U.S. strategic flexibility toward South Korea. It will start with the development of the strategic flexibility concept in U.S. international security policy. Two of the most important documents in recent U.S. national security and its military transformation, Quadrennial Defense Review 2001 (QDR 2001) and Global Defense Posture Review (GPR), will be reviewed in this context. After defining strategic flexibility as a core concept in the U.S. military transformation since September 11, the development of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy in the U.S.-ROK alliance is also discussed. Finally, this chapter examines the actual changes in USFK through the U.S. strategic flexibility policy such as reduction in troops, relocating bases, transferring military missions to ROK forces and most importantly, changing its role to a regional purpose.

Shifting to the regional implementation of this U.S. policy change, Chapter III is the case study on the transformation of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Under U.S. military transformation and GPR, the U.S. forces in Korea and also in Japan are similarly in the process of changing their overall force structure. After a brief review of the development of the U.S.-Japan alliance, this chapter mainly focuses on the transformation of the U.S.-Japan alliance in light of USFJ's realignment. The similarities and differences between the changes in the two alliances as well as the U.S. forces are discussed. Examination of

Japan's reactions to the U.S. military transformation will be helpful in terms of South Korea's policy options to the U.S. strategic flexibility. Lastly, this chapter explores the implications of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation for South Korea.

Chapter IV is the core of this thesis. Based on the definition of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy explored through Chapter II and the related case explored in Chapter III, the actual implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security will be examined. Chinese, North Korean and Japanese perspectives on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will be noted in order to help understand its implications to the region. Then, implications of the four critical aspects in the U.S. strategic flexibility policy are examined. The four aspects are: transforming to a regional alliance; weakening the North Korean deterrence; causing South Korea's involvement in a potential Taiwan Strait conflict; and causing an arm race in the region. Lastly, based on these implications, the gaps between the United States and South Korea regarding the U.S. strategic flexibility policy are examined.

Chapter V focuses on South Korea's policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. In order to assess the policy options, four criteria are suggested in this chapter. They are: the U.S.-ROK alliance; inter-Korean relations; self-reliant defense; and the relationship with China and Japan. These four criteria are emphasized as the most significant factors that must be considered in South Korea's policy options. Based on the level of accepting the strategic flexibility of USFK, three policy options are suggested in this chapter: active support policy; constraint policy; status quo with strategic ambiguities. Each option is assessed with the four criteria and consequently, the combination of the active support policy and the status quo is recommended as the South Korea's best policy option toward U.S. strategic flexibility.

Chapter VI is the conclusion of the thesis. It briefly summarizes the main arguments and the findings of the thesis. The best way to implement South Korea's recommended policy within the U.S.-ROK alliance is discussed. Also the further fields which should be studied regarding the U.S. strategic flexibility policy on South Korea is addressed.

II. WHAT IS THE U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY POLICY?

On January 19, 2006, the United States and South Korean governments launched “the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP)” meeting and made an agreement with regard to implementing “strategic flexibility.” The agreement on “strategic flexibility” by the United States and South Korea brought about large debates within South Korean society and is causing a serious problem between the two half-century old allies. Many Koreans argue that the strategic flexibility agreement will not benefit South Korea’s national interest which, in the short term, is to deter a North Korean threat and, in the long term, to foster peace on the peninsula. But others, including government officials, note that increased strategic flexibility would not reduce the deterrence capability of the alliance and should benefit South Korea by enhancing the U.S.-ROK alliance.²³

Practically, strategic flexibility means that United States Forces in Korea (USFK) may be used for other purposes by having “flexibility” in its strategic employment rather than solely defending South Korea from a North Korean invasion. However, there are many more implications embodied within this policy. Although the term strategic flexibility is only specifically applied to the USFK, the concept of strategic flexibility of U.S. forces worldwide was developed within a much broader context. The U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea basically stemmed from the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review 2001 (QDR 2001) and also was specified in the Global Defense Posture Review (GPR) in 2003 as well. Moreover, it was also a crucial part of the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2002.

In order to clearly understand the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea, first it is necessary to explore the concept of “strategic flexibility” in the overall U.S. international security policy. Careful examination of U.S. security and defense principles and policies are required in this process. The strategic flexibility policy mainly stems from the QDR 2001 and was specified through the GPR; hence the first part of this

²³ The details of the negative and positive aspects of the strategic flexibility will be examined in the Chapter IV while analyzing the implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security.

chapter will focus on these two major documents shaping U.S. international security policies and defense strategies, especially regarding strategic flexibility.

After generally defining strategic flexibility as a part of the U.S. international security strategy, the latter part of this chapter will delve into the specific details of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. Development of the U.S. strategic flexibility approach will be examined within the change of the U.S.-ROK security relationship since the end of the Cold War through the annual meetings and agreements between the two countries, such as the SCM, FOTA and, most recently, SCAP where strategic flexibility was finally negotiated. Additionally, details of the USFK realignment, such as troop reduction, base relocation, changing force structure, mission transfer and also the wartime Operational Command and Control issue will be articulated based on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Above all, it is important to note that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy is dominating the overall USFK realignment process, and thus USFK is transforming into multi-purpose regional force.

A. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY WITHIN U.S. INTERNATIONAL SECURITY POLICY

In the early 1990s the end of the Cold War against communism engendered a sense of triumph for the United States and its allies. The United States became the only superpower in the world. However, the sense of triumph did not last long. Although the main enemy had disappeared, the United States still had to check the emergence of potential states that could challenge United States' regional or global hegemony. Moreover, the United States began to realize that in the post-Cold War era, threats from nontraditional and unexpected sources could also seriously risk its national security. The U.S. threat perception in response to the New World Order are well expressed in the comment from former Clinton administration CIA Director, James Wolsey,: "We have slain the dragon but now live in a jungle full of poisonous snakes."²⁴ The United States recognized that it must break off from the Cold War-type fixed threat conception to cope with newer flexible and uncertain security threats within the world, and therefore must transform its security strategies and force structures in this regard.

²⁴ Paul Rogers, "Jungle of Snakes," *New Internationalist* 252, February 1994. <http://www.newint.org/issue252/endpiece.htm> (accessed November 22, 2006).

The U.S. Strategic flexibility policy was constructed within the context of this “uncertainty” of the global security environment that developed in the wake of the Cold War. In this context, uncertainty was the primary driving factor in the new U.S. international security policy for the 21st century. The 2002 U.S. National Security Strategy articulated the relationship between uncertainty and the need for flexibility in the U.S. forces overseas.

To contend with *uncertainty* and to meet the many security challenges we face, the United States will require bases and stations within and beyond Western Europe and Northeast Asia, as well as temporary access arrangements for the long-distance deployment of U.S. forces. Before the war in Afghanistan, that area was low on the list of major planning contingencies. Yet, in a very short time, we had to operate across the length and breadth of that remote nation, using every branch of the armed forces. We must prepare for more such deployments by developing assets such as advanced remote sensing, long-range precision strike capabilities, and transformed maneuver and expeditionary forces.[emphasis mine]²⁵

In order to face the security threats coming from future uncertain security environments, NSS 2002 clearly shows that the U.S. forces must be transformed into an agile and flexible, rapid-deployable expeditionary force with long range strike capabilities. It is evident that throughout the U.S. forces in the world, there will be less need of heavily armed Cold War-type fixed forces confronting a single enemy.

The concept of strategic flexibility was largely conceived in U.S. security policy even before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. However, by experiencing the unprecedented terrorist attacks in its homeland, the necessity of flexibility in the national security strategy was greatly emphasized. The September 11 attacks truly bolstered the notion of uncertainty in the security sphere to both policy makers and the people of the United States.²⁶

²⁵ The White House, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC, 2002), 29.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC, 2001), 2. “The Quadrennial Defense Review was undertaken during a crucial time of transition to a new era. Even before the attack of September 11, 2001, the senior leaders of the Defense Department set out to establish a new strategy for America’s defense that would embrace uncertainty and contend with surprise, a strategy premised on the idea that to be effective abroad, America must be safe at home.” “In important ways, these attacks (September 11) confirm the strategic direction and planning principles that resulted from this review...the attack on the United States on September 11, 2001 will require us to move forward more rapidly in these directions, even while we are engaged in the war against terrorism.”

During 2000-2003, the contour of the strategic flexibility policy was mostly completed within the new doctrines and principles of the U.S. security policies and defense strategies that were strongly driven by the first term of the Bush Administration. Although the agreement about strategic flexibility was made on January 2006 between the United States and South Korea, the strategic flexibility policy was already firmly established within the U.S. international security policy during the first four years of the current Bush administration. When the term “strategic flexibility” first appeared in the 35th U.S.-ROK SCM Joint Communiqué in November 2003, it was not just an independent policy toward South Korea and the USFK, but it was already one of the primary concepts in the U.S. security policy which shortly after the Communiqué appeared as part of the U.S. Global Defense Posture Review. The rest of this section evaluates each of these founding documents to help make clear the origins and intricacies of this doctrine.

1. Strategic Flexibility in the U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) 2001 and Global Defense Posture Review (GPR)

In 2001, the QDR was published and made clear that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy was widely applied throughout the document. By defining the current security environment as “an increasing diversity in the sources and unpredictability of the locations of conflict,” the document directly emphasized the necessity for flexibility of U.S. forces deployed abroad.

... Together, these trends produce a geopolitical setting that is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Unlike the Cold War period, where the key geographic regions of competition were well defined, the current period has already imposed demands for U.S. military intervention or activity on virtually every continent and against a wide variety of adversaries. *The United States will not be able to develop its military forces and plans solely to confront a specific adversary in a specific geographic area. Instead, the United States could be forced to intervene in unexpected crises against opponents with a wide range of capabilities.* Moreover, these interventions may take place in distant regions where urban environments, other complex terrain, and varied climatic conditions present major operational challenges.[emphasis mine]²⁷

Although the term “strategic flexibility” was not directly mentioned in the document, it was obvious that due to the uncertain security environment, flexibility

²⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC, 2001), 4.

should be a primary element in the new U.S. international security policy. When it stated *the U.S. will not focus on specific adversaries in a specific geographic area*, it is likely that this references North Korea in the Korean peninsula. Also, the United States' conflict with China in the Taiwan Strait is an obvious example of an *unexpected crisis against opponents with a wide range of capabilities*. In this context, it is evident that the USFK should be transformed into an expeditionary force to confront any unexpected crisis in the region.

Global Defense Posture Review (GPR) also clearly represents the strategic flexibility concept. The Bush administration identified Defense Transformation (DT)²⁸ as a major goal for the Department of Defense (DOD) from the very beginning of the administration and, as a result, submitted the "Defense Transformation Act for the 21st Century" to Congress in April 2003. Even before then, the U.S. DOD worked hard to refine and implement its plans for defense transformation. The GPR was considered one of the crucial parts of the U.S. Defense Transformation process.²⁹ It is also developed from the QDR 2001 and the NSS 2002.

One of the first official documents regarding GPR was a speech made by Douglas J. Feith, the U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in December 2003, titled "Transforming the United States Global Defense Posture."³⁰ In this speech, the five key themes of changing the U.S. global defense posture were clearly defined:

²⁸ Three major official documents related to the U.S. Defense transformation are: U.S. DOD, *Military Transformation: A Strategic Approach* (Washington, DC, 2003), U.S. DOD, *Transformation Planning Guidance* (Washington, DC, 2003), and U.S. DOD, *Elements of Defense Transformation* (Washington, DC, 2004).

²⁹ According to *Military Transformation: A Strategic Approach*, enhancing U.S. military global posture is one of the major U.S. defense transformation strategies. "The global U.S. military posture must be reoriented for a new strategic environment in which U.S. interests are global and new challenges, particularly anti-access and area-denial threats, are emerging. The U.S. military is developing and enhanced forward deterrent posture through the integration of new combinations of immediately employable forward stationed and deployed forces...Over time, this reoriented global posture will render forward forces capable of more swiftly defeating an adversary's military and political objectives with only modest reinforcement." 6.

³⁰ Speech presented to the Center for Strategic and International Studies Washington, D.C., December 3, 2003. The statement with similar contents regarding the GPR, was made before the House Armed Services Committee by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in June 23, 2004. The five elements are introduced as the principles for realignment in this statement.

- a. Strengthen allied roles
- b. Contend with uncertainty
- c. Focus across regions as well as within them
- d. Develop rapidly deployable capabilities
- e. Focus on capabilities, not numbers.

It is important to go over these five key elements in GPR because it is also the key elements of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. First, by *strengthening allied roles* the GPR implies that the U.S. allies should also transform their own military strategies and force structures according to the U.S. military transformation. Second, the U.S. and allied forces should be transformed to more agile and flexible expeditionary forces in order to prepare for the uncertain challenges in the future security environment. Third, during the Cold War the U.S. forces were deployed to counter a specific threat in a specific place, but challenges in the post-Cold War era comes from unexpected places, *not only within the region but more globally*. Therefore, fourth, the U.S. forces must possess *capabilities to rapidly deploy* throughout the region and beyond regions. They should not only focus on the issues from where they are deployed but also should have capacity to contend with various other threats in various other places. Lastly, GPR emphasizes that the enhanced capabilities with the RMA could *increase overall force capabilities without increasing the troop numbers*. Namely, with fewer numbers of forward deployed troops, the U.S. force capabilities will possess more enhanced capabilities than before. These five key elements in GPR clearly reflect the key characteristics of the U.S. strategic flexibility toward South Korea.³¹

On 16 August 2004, President Bush formally announced the new U.S. global defense posture to its people and to the world:

Over the coming decade, we will deploy a more agile and more flexible force, which means that more of our troops will be stationed and deployed from here at home. We will move some of our troops and capabilities to new locations, so they can surge quickly to deal with unexpected threats. We'll take advantage of 21st century military technologies to rapidly deploy increased combat power. The new plan will help us fight and win these wars of the 21st century.... [emphasis mine]

³¹ Won-Gon Park, “U.S. Military Policy: Transformation, GPR and U.S. Forces in Korea (Migujeu gunsajungchaek: byunhwani, GPR mit juhammigun),” *KIDA Weekly Defense Forum* 1007 (04-32), August 9, 2004.

In September 2004, the U.S. Department of Defense submitted *The Strengthening U.S. Defense Posture*³² report to Congress. The document reiterated President Bush's announcement in August highlighting key aspects of the planned posture changes. Further development was made in this document including a detailed region-by-region synopsis of the U.S. global defense realignment. In the document, the Asia-Pacific region was highlighted with the following:

In the Asia-Pacific region, we seek to improve our ability to meet our alliance commitments by strengthening our deterrent against threats such as that posed by North Korea, while helping our allies strengthen their own military capabilities. In this region – in light of the vast distances that military forces must traverse in crises – this means *increasing our ability to project military forces rapidly and at long ranges, both to the region and within it.* [emphasis mine]³³

Most importantly, for the first time throughout the development of U.S. military transformation, this document officially indicated that the changes in USFK are based on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. The Korean peninsula is discussed separately in the document, and the strategic flexibility of USFK is further specified by transforming part of the USFK to *Stryker units and air expeditionary forces*, and relocating current forward deployed bases to *two major hubs south of the Han River*.

On the Korean peninsula, our planned enhancements and realignments are intended to strengthen our overall military effectiveness for the combined defense of the Republic of Korea. Stationed forces will relocate away from the increasing congestion and sprawl of the greater Seoul area and will be *consolidated into two major hubs in the central and southern sections of the country.* Rotational and rapidly deployable combat capabilities such as *Stryker units and air expeditionary forces will complement these permanently stationed units.* We seek to retain a robust pre-positioned equipment capability in Korea to support rapid reinforcement. Finally, our broader improvements to other regional military forces, such as the forward deployment of additional expeditionary maritime capabilities and long-range strike assets, will increase both our deterrent effect and capacity for rapid response. [emphasis mine]³⁴

³² U.S. Department of Defense, *The Strengthening U.S. Defense Posture* (Washington, DC, 2004).

³³ Ibid., 12.

³⁴ Ibid., 12.

It is critical for South Korea to understand these changes in USFK in the larger context of implementing the U.S. GPR process than simply viewing the transformation as changing the security relationship within the U.S.-ROK alliance. Since the end of the Cold War, Western Europe and Northeast Asia had become “springboards” for operations in the Balkans, the Persian Gulf, and later, Central Asia. As a result, the U.S. forward deployed forces no longer expected to fight in place. Instead, they needed the capacity to project into theaters that were likely to be some distance away from their garrison.³⁵ In this context, the realignment of the U.S. GPR combines a *network* of traditional and new facilities to enhance the capacity for prompt global action. This network consists of three types of newly defined U.S. facilities overseas: main operating bases (MOBs); forward operating sites (FOSs), which are expandable “warm facilities”³⁶ for use by rotational forces and maintained with limited U.S. military support presence; and cooperative security locations (CSLs), which are facilities with little or no permanent U.S. presence and maintained with periodic contractor or host-nation support.³⁷

Among the three, Camp Humphreys in South Korea – which is located in the Osan-Pyungtaek area, south of Seoul where one of the two major hubs that will form USFK’s relocation – became an example of a Main Operating Base (MOB), together with Ramstein Air Base in Germany and Kadena Air Base in Okinawa, Japan.³⁸ The MOB, which is one of the significant type of facilities in the future U.S. defense global posture, will be characterized by command and control structures, family support facilities, and strengthened force protection measures, in addition to permanently stationed combat forces and a robust infrastructure. With the two other types of facilities – FOS, and CSL, – the future Camp Humphreys as a MOB will be fully integrated into the U.S. global force network system by serving as a key en route infrastructure in the region. It is apparent that in order to enhance geographic access capability of the forward stationed U.S. forces,

³⁵ Ryan Henry, “Transforming the U.S. Global Defense Posture,” *Naval War College Review* (Spring 2006): 1.

³⁶ By creating these “warm” bases, FOSs are often described as “Lily Pads.” Instead of the Cold War idea of basing large numbers of troops to face a known enemy in a predictable place there would be a series of bases strung out across the world like lilies across a pond. Paul Reynolds, “U.S. Redeploying for Quick Action,” *BBC News*, August 16, 2004. According to *The Strengthening U.S. Defense Posture* examples of FOS include: Sembawang port facility in Singapore and Soto Cano Air Base in Honduras.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, *The Strengthening U.S. Defense Posture*. 10.

such as USFK, the “deployability” based on improved mobility and flexibility is a key to the U.S. military transformation strategy. Therefore, defining Camp Humphreys as a MOB strongly implies that the U.S. GPR is transforming the posture of USFK based on “strategic flexibility.”

In sum, careful overviews of the major documents such as QDR 2001, NSS, DT and especially GPR clearly showed that the concept of strategic flexibility is well incorporated into the new U.S. international security policy and defense strategies developed during the first term Bush administration. Examination of the U.S. international security policy development through the lens of strategic flexibility underscores the fact that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea has much broader and deeper implications than just relocating bases and reducing troops in South Korea. Again, as discussed above, flexibility is the core concept not only in the U.S. defense policy toward South Korea but also in the U.S. national security strategy to change its overall security system to cope with the “uncertain” future.

B. DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY WITHIN THE U.S.-ROK SECURITY RELATIONSHIP

The basic concept of USFK strategic flexibility was shown initially within the ROK-US alliance in the early 1990s. After the end of the Cold War, as the major threat disappeared in the region, both the U.S.-ROK alliance and the U.S.-Japan alliance needed to shift the role of U.S. forces from deterring Soviet threats to contributing to regional stability. This was presented in the Joint Communiqué of the 24th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM)³⁹ in 1993 and thereafter, as it newly emphasized that “the alliance will serve to keep peace and stability in Northeast Asia and the Asia Pacific region as a whole.”⁴⁰

³⁹ U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) is a ministerial level annual meeting between the U.S. and ROK. The first meeting was held in Washington D.C. in 1968, and recently there was the 38th U.S.-ROK SCM in Washington D.C. The SCM is the highest level security talks between the two countries under the Secretary of Defense and Defense Minister. There is a Military Committee Meeting (MCM) between the both U.S. and ROK’s chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, held since 1978.

⁴⁰ U.S.-ROK 25th SCM Joint Communiqué. 1993. The U.S. position changed from the previous years’ SCM Joint Communiqué which highlighted that “U.S. forces should remain in Korea as long as the governments and people of the United States and the Republic of Korea believe that they provide deterrence against North Korea and serve the interests of peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.”

Furthermore, the U.S. and ROK agreed to conduct a joint study to consider guidelines for the long-term U.S.-ROK security relationship.⁴¹ As a result, in 1994, RAND in the U.S. and KIDA in Korea, both government funded research institutes, jointly published a report called *The New Alliance for the Next Century: The Future of the US-Korean Security Cooperation*. Among the alternatives for the future U.S.-ROK alliance, the report suggested a “regional security alliance” as the best policy option to both the U.S. and South Korean governments for their future relationship.⁴²

However, developing the U.S.-ROK alliance into a regional security alliance by changing USFK to a more regional force could not proceed further during the latter part of the decade due to the evolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis. The basic USFK reduction plan which was specified in the *East Asia Strategy Initiative* in 1990⁴³ was also postponed and finally cancelled. Since then geopolitical aspects on the Korean peninsula left the USFK tied up in the peninsula mainly focusing on deterring North Korean threats during the rest of the decade.

It was largely the U.S. military transformation during the first term of the Bush administration and the September 11 terrorist attacks which again raised the idea of USFK’s regional role and strategic flexibility – which had become a crucial element of the U.S. international security strategy – in the U.S.-ROK alliance. However, it is important to note that South Korea’s constant development in its military capabilities backed by decades of rapid economic growth, compared with North Korea’s relative backwardness in its overall national strength due to years of underdevelopment, also heavily influenced changes in the U.S.-ROK security relationship. Additionally, South Korea’s long desire to achieve “Self-Reliant Defense,”⁴⁴ coupled with growing

⁴¹ It was agreed upon during the SCM in 1992.

⁴² Jonathan D. Pollack and Young-Koo Cha, *The New Alliance for the Next Century: The Future of the US-Korean Security Cooperation* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1995) The four alternatives for the future ROK-US alliance in the report were: 1) a robust peninsula alliance, 2) a reconfigured peninsula alliance, 3) a regional security alliance, and 4) a political alliance.

⁴³ U.S. DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to the Congress* (Washington, DC, 1990).

Based on the East Asia Strategy Initiative in 1990, the U.S. implemented phase I (1990~1992) withdraw plan and as the result a total of 26,000 troops were reduced in Asia including 7,000 troops from South Korea. Phase II and III was never implemented.

⁴⁴ Specific details about South Korea’s “Self-Reliant Defense” will be discussed in Chapter V.

nationalism based on changes in the inter-Korean relationship after the historic summit between the two Koreas in June 2000,⁴⁵ also influenced both countries' security relationship. Therefore, not only the U.S. military transformation and the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States but also changes in South Korea's security environment bolstered the realignment of USFK, as well as transforming the U.S.-ROK security relationship. At the beginning of the new century, after maintaining an extra decade of the Cold War type security relationship, the changes in that security relationship became inevitable.

In the 34th SCM, in 2002, the United States and ROK both agreed upon "the importance of adapting the alliance to changes in the global security environment" and "established a Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative (FOTA)."⁴⁶ FOTA talks became crucial to forming a new security relationship between the two countries based on changes in the USFK. A number of significant issues within the USFK, including the relocation of the Yongsan Garrison, were discussed in the FOTA talks. Throughout the negotiations, the U.S. lobbied to change the USFK posture based on the GPR, but South Korea wanted assurances that the U.S. would maintain its defense commitment to South Korea. To some extent, the FOTA talks were regarded as highly successful because many of the changes in USFK were agreed upon between the two countries. However, at the same time, through the painful negotiating process, both parties apparently realized their different perceptions on the objectives of the alliance and the role of the USFK. Consequently, after 18 months of FOTA negotiations, the ROK and U.S. governments agreed to the following:⁴⁷

1. Relocation of U.S. forces from the Seoul metropolitan area
2. Enhancement of combined capabilities
3. Transfer of military missions
4. Realignment of U.S. forces based in Korea

⁴⁵ The leaders of the two Koreas, Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jung-Il met at Pyongyang, the capital of North Korea in June 15, 2000. It was the first summit meeting between two Koreas in the history of ROK and DPRK.

⁴⁶ U.S.-ROK 34th SCM Joint Communiqué. 2002.

⁴⁷ FOTA: June 2003-August 2004.

It is clear that these changes in USFK, particularly *transferring military missions* and the *realignment*, stem from the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. The term “strategic flexibility” first appeared in the 35th SCM, in November 2003, at the same time emphasizing the issues discussed in the FOTA talks.⁴⁸ The 35th SCM announcement occurred right before the aforementioned public speech by Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Faith regarding transforming the U.S. Global Defense Posture in the following month.

On May 15, 2004, the United States surprised the ROK government with the announcement that it would dispatch the Second Brigade of the Second Infantry Division, about 3,600 troops, to Iraq. Moreover, within less than a month, on June 6, the United States also delivered its plan to withdraw 12,500 troops from South Korea by December 2005. Although there were some adjustments later on the issue of withdrawing 12,500 troops by extending its due date to the end of 2008, this was clearly the beginning execution of strategic flexibility within USFK and also implicated the future changing role of USFK. Since then, there have been many examples demonstrating the expanding role of USFK and its flexible use. The joint statements in the 2004 and 2005 SCMs both reemphasized strategic flexibility by “reaffirming the continuing importance of the strategic flexibility of U.S. forces in the ROK.”⁴⁹ In this context, in May 2005, Gen. Charles Cambell, Commander of the Eighth U.S. Army in Korea, stated in public that “the U.S.-ROK alliance is transforming into a regional alliance and that the operational sphere of the U.S.-ROK joint forces can be extended to Northeast Asia,”⁵⁰ which reflected U.S. intentions to make the U.S.-ROK alliance a regional alliance.

Gen. Cambell’s announcement ignited huge debates within South Korea about the strategic flexibility of USFK. The core debate questioned whether the strategic flexibility

⁴⁸ The 35th SCM Joint Communiqué article four says that “Secretary Rumsfeld and Minister Cho expressed satisfaction with the results to date of the Future of the ROK-US Alliance Policy Initiative (FOTA), which began in 2003, and continues in 2004. They reviewed agreements for the relocation of US forces from the Seoul metropolitan area, enhancement of combined capabilities, transfer of military missions, and the realignment of US forces based in Korea. Both agreed that these initiatives, once fully implemented, will modernize and strengthen the alliance while adapting it to changes in the global security environment. In this regard, the Secretary and the Minister reaffirmed the continuing importance of the strategic flexibility of United States forces in the Republic of Korea.”

⁴⁹ U.S.-ROK 35 ~ 36th SCM Joint Communiqués. 2003 ~ 2004.

⁵⁰ “U.S.-ROK Alliance Heading toward Regional Alliance (Hanmidongmaengeu jieokdongmanghwa),” *Chosunilbo*, May 25, 2005.

of USFK benefited South Korea's national interest or not, and how it would change the U.S.-ROK security relationship. It was clear that because of USFK's changing posture as an expeditionary force there was a possibility for South Korea to become entangled within a regional conflict unintentionally. Moreover, transforming USFK to a more regional force could lessen the deterrence to North Korea which was the major role of the U.S. Forces stationed in Korea since the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty. In this context, in March 2005, the South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun made a speech at the South Korean Air Force Academy that "Korea will never be involved in conflicts in Northeast Asia without our consent" and that "this is a firm principle that can never be compromised."⁵¹

However, on January 19, 2006, the U.S. and ROK launched the Strategic Consultation for Allied Partnership (SCAP) and the long debated strategic flexibility of USFK was officially agreed upon between the two countries:

Regarding the issue of strategic flexibility of U.S. forces in the ROK, Secretary Rice and Foreign Minister Ban confirmed the understanding of both governments as follows: *The ROK, as an ally, fully understands the rationale for the transformation of the U.S. global military strategy, and respects the necessity for strategic flexibility of the U.S. forces in the ROK. In the implementation of strategic flexibility, the U.S. respects the ROK position that it shall not be involved in a regional conflict in Northeast Asia against the will of the Korean people.*⁵² [emphasis mine]

Regarding the agreement on strategic flexibility, many South Koreans strongly criticized their government on accepting the strategic flexibility commitments of USFK, and some radical social groups requested immediate cancellation of the agreement. The agreement was regarded as a "document of surrender" to the United States by the South Korean public.⁵³ Many argued that the term "respect" is not sufficient and specific enough to guarantee South Korea's security from unintended involvement in potential regional conflicts. This criticism worsened when one of the National Assembly members released

⁵¹ "Strategic Flexibility must not Risk South Korea (Jeonlakjeok yuyeonseong, hangu anbo wihyupmalaya)," *Chosunilbo*, March 9, 2005.

⁵² U.S.-ROK SCAP Joint Statement. 2006.

⁵³ Chul-Kee Lee, "Strategic Flexibility of U.S. Forces in Korea," 1.

the “December 2005 ROK NSC meeting document (NSC 355).”⁵⁴ According to the document, the South Korean government could not reach agreement with the U.S. on the issue of establishing a “prior consultation process”⁵⁵ as part of U.S. strategic flexibility policy, which is viewed as a method to limit the strategic flexibility of USFK. Also, regarding the USFK’s regional role, the document suggested an approval from the National Assembly might be needed prior to the agreement on strategic flexibility with the United States, because it could be interpreted as violating the U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty in 1950⁵⁶ – which never happened. Therefore, the South Korean government’s diplomatic inability within the negotiation process and also the legitimacy of the agreement has been highly debated since then.

Although details of the negotiation process was never released to the South Korean public, it was generally accepted that South Korea had no choice but to make an agreement with U.S. strategic flexibility due to the importance of maintaining its security relationship with the United States. Consequently, it became clear that South Korea would accept the basic changes of USFK’s role in the Korean peninsula, and must seriously consider the implications of strategic flexibility for its own security and also for future U.S.-ROK alliance.

C. U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY POLICY AND REALIGNMENT OF USFK

It is necessary to examine how the actual changes in USFK realignment are closely related to the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. The USFK is under the process of fundamental realignment for the first time in its history. Realignment mainly includes 1) troop reduction, 2) base relocation, 3) changing force structure, 4) transferring missions, and 5) transferring wartime Operational Command and Control (OPCON). Close examination of the details of the realignment clearly indicate that it will increase the flexibility of USFK. Through the realignment, ground forces will be

⁵⁴ Jae-Chun Choi, “Criticizing the Agreement on Strategic Flexibility (Junlakjeok yuyeonseong hapeu bipan),” *Ohmynews*, January 23, 2006.

⁵⁵ “What Happened in NSC Meeting in December 29, 2005? (12/29 NSC sangim wiwonheoeseo mosunili iteotna?)” *Ohmynews*, February 1, 2006.

⁵⁶ It is debated that U.S. strategic flexibility is violating Article II and III of the U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty, which defined the condition of exercising force in case that either of the parties are threatened by external armed attack in either of the parties’ territories in the Pacific area. U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty. October 1, 1953.

reduced while the Navy and Air Force capabilities are likely to be increased. Moreover, the remaining ground forces are expected to be transformed into a more agile and flexible Stryker Brigade Combat Team (SBCT). Overall, relocating the bases to more easily deployable locations and changing forces to SBCT apparently show the changing role of USFK from solely deterring North Korea to a regional multi-purpose force.

1. Troop Reduction

Before the 2nd brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division with its 3,600 troops left for Iraq in 2004, the total number of U.S. troops in Korea was around 37,500-28,300 Army and 8,700 Air Force.⁵⁷ Through the FOTA talks during in 2004, the U.S. and ROK decided to reduce strength by 12,500 USFK troops, including the 3,600 already dispatched to Iraq. The withdrawal will be accomplished in a three phase reduction plan concluding in 2008. Phase I has been implemented, reducing 5,000 troops from the 3rd battle brigade by 2004. The phase II is scheduled to bring back 5,000 troops mainly from ground and air support by 2006. Finally, the phase III reduction will include 2,500 ground support troops by the end of 2008. However, counter-firing assets such as MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System) and counter-battery radars were excluded from withdrawal due to their importance for deterring North Korea. As a result, there will be 25,000 USFK troops remaining in the Korean peninsula after 2009.

2. Base Relocation

Relocating bases is a crucial element in the realignment process. The USFK bases have not been relocated since they were first established at the end of the Korean War. A Military base is a place where military forces are stationed in order to accomplish military objectives based on strategy; thus, relocation of military bases is critically related to the objectives of military strategy. Relocation clearly reflects the idea of increasing strategic flexibility of the USFK. Broadly, the relocation plan contains returning Yongsan base to Seoul city⁵⁸ and pulling back all USFK bases near the DMZ and north of the Han River to the two hubs to the south of Han River, Osan-Pyungtaek and Daegu-

⁵⁷ There are fewer than 500 U.S. Navy and Marines personnel stationed in South Korea.

⁵⁸ The first attempt to relocate the USFK Yongsan Garrison started in the early 1990s. However, mainly due to its excessive relocation expenses, the project had been put on hold since June 1993. The two countries eventually made an agreed on the principles of the relocating Yongsan Garrison at the U.S.-ROK Summit in May 2003.

Busan.⁵⁹ At the end of the Korean War, most of the ground bases were located near the DMZ and along the expected routes from the DMZ to Seoul. Since then, it is widely believed that the forward deployed U.S. ground forces served as “tripwire”⁶⁰ by engaging the United States into the war automatically with their sacrifice during a North Korean invasion. The relocation of the bases north of the Han River will end this role of “tripwire” and increase the survivability of the U.S. ground forces. However, at the same time this can be perceived as weakening the U.S. capabilities to deter an invasion by the North.

The 2nd Infantry Division bases will be relocated in two phases. In phase I, all the bases north of the Han River will be integrated into Camp Casey in Dongduchon and Camp Red Cloud in Uijeongbu, which are located between the DMZ and Seoul by 2006. In phase II, most of the bases of the 2nd Infantry Division will be relocated to Camp Humphreys in Pyungtaek. However, even after the completion of phase II, the U.S. military rotational training presence north of the Han River will be sustained.⁶¹

3. Changing Force Structure

After the 7th Infantry Division left Korea in 1979, the 2nd Infantry Division became the only ground force deterring the million man North Korean army. Since that time, the 2nd Infantry Division has been the symbol of the U.S. defense commitment to South Korea, designed to counter the North’s ground attack by its heavy armed and artillery forces. Changing the force structure of the 2nd Infantry Division to a more flexible and deployable force is the core of the transformation.⁶² Basically, the ground force structure will be changed from a formal Division-focused structure to a Brigade-

⁵⁹ Seong-Ryoul Cho, “The Realignment of USFK and the U.S.-ROK Alliance in Transition,” in *The United States and the Korean Peninsula in the 21st Century* (Vermont: Ashgate), 104. “USFK reduction and its relocation to south of the Han River were intended to have a flexible setup in order to cope with new threats and uncertainties from China. ... This plan was to minimize the conflict with Korean residents and to maintain a stable USFK presence and to expand the USFK brief to encompass regional roles.

⁶⁰ The role of the USFK has been largely regarded as a “tripwire.” It means because of its forward deployment near the DMZ, in case of North Korea’s unexpected invasion or heavy artillery attack, it will be the first force to encounter North Korean forces and mostly sacrificed in the war. Therefore, it will bring an automatic increase in support of South Korea from the United States. Doug Bandow, *Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed War* (Washington, DC: Cato Institute, 1996), 33-55.

⁶¹ U.S.-ROK Future of the Alliance Policy Initiative (FOTA) 2nd Joint Statement. June 5, 2003.

⁶² Cho, “The Realignment of USFK and the U.S.-ROK Alliance in Transition,” 104. It is argued in the article that the USFK will be transformed to the Quick Reaction Force (QRF).

level Unit of Action (UA) within the new combat system.⁶³ These UAs will be able to carry out their own independent operations. Therefore, the 2nd Infantry Division will consist of two UAs. The remaining 1st Brigade will be transformed into Heavy Brigade Combat Team (HBCT), and all the air assets will be integrated into the new Multi-Functional Aviation Brigade (MFAB). The new Brigades will consist of 5-7 Battalions (a current Brigade consists of 2-3 battalions). In addition, in order to support the forces in and out of the peninsula, a “Sustainment Brigade” is planned to be founded.

The details of transforming the 2nd Infantry Division clearly reflect the implementation of strategic flexibility policy. Namely, increasing battalions to 5-7 indicates that they will be flexibly dispatched to places out of the peninsula depending on the situation and their mission. Lighter forces are considered to be more agile and easily deployable. This force structure will be more efficient and adaptable to low intensity conflicts, MOOTWS (Military Operation Other Than War) and also to counter-terrorism situations.

4. Transferring Missions

During the FOTA negotiation in 2003-2004, both sides agreed on transferring certain military missions of USFK to ROK forces by 2006.⁶⁴ By transferring the following ten major military missions which were mainly to counter a North Korean attack, the ROK forces’ role in defense of the peninsula will be expanded while the U.S. forces will have more flexibility in their force structure. The ten missions include: rear-area decontamination, Joint Security Area (JSA) security, mine emplacement, air-to-ground range management, counter-fire headquarters, maritime Counter-Special Operations Forces (C-SOF) interdiction, Military Police (MP) rotation and control, Search and Rescue (SAR), Close Air Support (CAS) and weather forecasting. Most of the missions have been transferred to ROK forces during the last three years. One of the South Korean concerns was regarding the issue of transferring the counter-fire headquarters thus it was agreed on to evaluate the ROK capability periodically before

⁶³ Cho, “The Realignment of USFK and the U.S.-ROK Alliance in Transition,” 104. “According to the U.S. Military Transformation, the 8th U.S. Army Command is to be changed into UEy (Unit of Employment Y), and the 2nd Infantry Division Command into UEx.

⁶⁴ U.S.-ROK 2nd FOTA Joint Statement. June 5, 2003.

transferring the mission. But recently ROK army created a Guided Missile Headquarter to carry out the counter-fire mission and as a result the counter-fire mission was transferred to ROK forces.⁶⁵

5. Transferring Wartime Operational Command and Control

Transferring the wartime Operational Command and Control (OPCON) is another debated issue within the alliance together with the strategic flexibility of USFK. The OPCON of ROK forces was originally transferred to the United Nation Command (UNC) during the Korean War in 1950 and was maintained until 1978, when the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) was formed. Since then, the OPCON has been under the authority of the CFC Commander.⁶⁶ In 1994 the OPCON was divided to wartime and peacetime OPCON, and in response to the strong request of South Korean president Roh Tae-Woo, the peacetime OPCON was assigned to ROK.

From South Korea's perspective, recovering the wartime OPCON from USFK has been the symbol of eliminating the asymmetrical patron-client relationship with United States, and finally achieving self-reliant national defense. South Koreans have long desired full sovereignty over its military command. Most of the people in South Korea support recovering wartime OPCON eventually, but they differ on the timing. Conservatives and most former military officers argue that South Korea is still not ready to defend itself, and insist that the CFC system must remain in order to successfully deter North Korea. More liberals insist that the ROK should recover wartime OPCON as soon as possible.⁶⁷ In this context, from the beginning of his administration, South Korean President Roh announced that South Korea should take the initiative and begin negotiations with the United States to take over the wartime OPCON.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ ROK Army Guided Missile Command was founded in September 28, 2006.

⁶⁶ On July 14, 1950 South Korean President Rhee sent a letter to General MacArthur, the Commander of the UNC, saying that he would hand over the 'Command Authority,' and MacArthur replied, accepting the Operational Command transfer.

⁶⁷ Dong-Man Seo, "Recovering Wartime OPCON and South Korea's Security Concerns (Jeonsi jakjeontongjegwon hwansoowa hangukeu anbo gaeneom)," *Pressian Korean Peninsula Briefing* 17, August 16, 2006.

⁶⁸ Through various speeches and announcements since 2003, president Roh has strongly argued that South Korea must take over the wartime OPCON from the United States in ten years. In August 2006, president Roh told the Yonhap news agency that Korea is capable of exercising sole wartime operational control of its troops "even if we get it back now." "Roh under Fire Over Wartime Command Withdrawal," *Chosunilbo*, August 10, 2006.

During the 37th U.S.-ROK SCM in 2005, the two parties agreed to “appropriately accelerate discussions on command relations and wartime operational control.”⁶⁹ It is known that although the United States agreed to transfer the wartime OPCON to South Korea, the two countries differed on the timeline of the transfer. The U.S. wants to transfer it by 2009, when the phase I of the U.S. base relocations to Osan-Pyungtaek area are about to be completed, whereas the ROK prefers to take over by 2012, after the first stage of its Defense Reform plan has implemented. Finally, it was agreed upon during the U.S.-ROK 38th SCM on October 2006 that the transition of OPCON to the ROK will be after October 15, 2009 but not later than March 15, 2012.⁷⁰

The transition of wartime OPCON from USFK to ROK forces is also critically related to the strategic flexibility and the transforming of USFK. It will bring many more responsibilities to South Korea for its own defense; at the same time, the U.S. forces will be able to focus more on other missions outside of the peninsula.

D. THE STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY OF THE USFK

An overview of the major documents and agreements of both countries clarified that strategic flexibility is one of the main components in the U.S. international security strategy. It also showed how the U.S. strategic flexibility policy was developed throughout the U.S.-ROK security relationship. The QDR 2001 and GPR clearly demonstrated the importance of strategic flexibility in the U.S. security policy. Through the SCMs and FOTA talks, and later SCAP, the United States and South Korea were able to agree on the realignment of the USFK based on strategic flexibility.

To cope with uncertain security environments in Northeast Asia, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy emphasized the agility and flexibility of U.S. forces deployed in the region. In this context, the USFK is transforming itself to regional forces. Downsizing the troops will allow more flexibility in its deployment out of the peninsula. Relocating and integrating current dispersed bases near the DMZ to the two hub bases south of the Han River will increase not only survivability but also efficiency in its deployment to other places in the region. Moreover, the new bases in the Osan and Pyungtaek area are

⁶⁹ In the Joint Statement of the U.S.-ROK 37th SCM in 2005, the U.S. and ROK “agreed to appropriately accelerate discussion on command relations and wartime operational control.”

⁷⁰ U.S.-ROK 38th SCM Joint Communiqué. October 20, 2006.

more weighted toward the Air Force and Navy than Army.⁷¹ The advantages of the current U.S. 7th Air Force Command in Osan and ROK Navy 2nd Fleet Command in Pyungtaek will be fully utilized within the realignment. The USFK's agility and flexibility will certainly be increased based on enhanced naval and air lift capability.⁷² Changing the 2nd Infantry Division to Brigade level UAs will greatly enhance its mobility. Transferring major USFK missions and also wartime OPCON to ROK forces will certainly reduce its responsibility in deterring North Korea. Therefore, it is clear that the strategic flexibility of USFK will be greatly enhanced through the overall USFK realignment process. Every aspect of the transformation indicates that USFK is posturing for a more regional role than just constraining itself within the peninsula and providing deterrence to the North Korean military threat.

As for South Korea, the increasing strategic flexibility of USFK has more implications than just changing its role to perform as a regional force. First of all, it will have great influence on South Korea's defense policies as the ROK forces take more responsibility in its defense. Under the continuous military threat from North Korea, the deterrence of North Korea's military ambition toward the South will remain vital to its survival. Secondly, it could change inter-Korean relations. North Korea has always been sensitive to changes in the U.S.-ROK military relationship. There is a possibility that North Korea could react to frequent movement of the USFK as it performs a regional role. Thirdly, expanding the role of USFK from the peninsula to the region could bring concerns from the other regional actors. China will be the first to respond to the regional role of USFK, as it had already condemned the regional role of USFJ as the U.S.-Japan alliance enlarged its military cooperation. Last but most importantly, the transforming of USFK could possibly change South Korea's long unchanged security relationship with

⁷¹ During the Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee Military Strategy and Operational Requirements in the FY 2007 Defense Budget in Mar 7 2006, General Bell, Commander of the USFK noted that, "In the future, to support the ROK... I envision U.S. military contributions to the alliance to be air-and naval-centric."

⁷² Chang-Hee Nam and others, "U.S.-Japan-Korea Security Cooperation in the Changing Defense Posture of the U.S. Forces in Northeast Asia," *Korea Observer* 37, no. 3 (2006): 475. "Pyungtaek and Osan areas will perfectly serve the purposes for the transformed USFK on the peninsula. Osan and Pyungtaek areas are close to each other, and Camp Humphreys in Pyungtaek is close to the large naval port hosting South Korea's 2nd Fleet Command. Both bases are conveniently located for air lift and sea lift operations, which the Pentagon's so-called military transformation requires."

the United States. As the USFK becomes a regional force, there are greater possibilities that the U.S.-ROK alliance could be transformed into a more regionally active alliance than just confronting the North's military threat.

Therefore, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy has many aspects that could decisively influence the security environments surrounding South Korea. Potential impacts of U.S. strategic flexibility must be carefully overviewed in this regard. The following chapters in the thesis will further discuss these implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security.

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III. THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA

There are two main purposes in this case study on the transformation of the U.S.-Japan alliance. As the USFJ is also under an unprecedented realignment process initiated by the U.S. military transformation plan, this chapter first examines how the U.S.-Japan alliance is changing under U.S. military transformation. Then the similarities and differences from changes in the U.S.-ROK alliance are also discussed. This helps understanding the relationship between the U.S.-Japan transformation and the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. Secondly, through the three basic agreements regarding the transformation,⁷³ this chapter goes over the ways in which Japan responded to U.S. military transformation and examines the implications for South Korea. Considering that Japan is strengthening its security relationship with the United States through transformation, this will be very helpful for South Korea as it considers its policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy which not only reflect its security interests but also could bolster the U.S.-ROK alliance.

In order to achieve these two purposes, the development of the U.S.-Japan alliance since the end of the Cold War is discussed in historical context. This is necessary to understand the characteristics of the U.S.-Japan alliance and find out the differences to the U.S.-ROK alliances. After the general overview on the U.S.-Japan alliance, the transformation of the U.S.-Japan alliance based on the recent U.S.-Japan Security Council Committee (Two-Plus-Two)⁷⁴ agreements between the two countries are examined. The issues such as, what are the purpose of the transformation, what are the implications of the USFJ realignment, and why and how is it different from changes in the U.S.-ROK alliance, are addressed in this part. Differences between the two forces in the actual realignment process are also identified.

⁷³ U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) Joint Statement. February 29, 2005.

U.S.-Japan SCC Document, U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future. October 29, 2005. U.S.-Japan SCC Document, U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation. May 1, 2006.

⁷⁴ U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) (or Two-Plus-Two) is a ministerial-level meeting in which the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense and the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of State for Defense (also Director-General of the Defense Agency) participate.

Considering the current debates and oppositions to the U.S. strategic flexibility policy within South Korea, it is important to go over Japan's reactions toward the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation process. Although there were some problems between the two countries over the realignment process such as burden sharing issues,⁷⁵ the overall transformation process was considered highly successful in terms of further strengthening the alliance. Lastly, the overall implications from the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation to the U.S.-ROK alliance are discussed.

A. DEVELOPMENT OF THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE

The U.S.-Japan alliance is considered one of the most successful bilateral security relationships in the post-World War II era. This was possible because of the many adjustments that were made within the alliance as circumstances changed during the Cold War. The revision of the Security Treaty in 1960 basically reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to defend Japan although it was undertaken in the course of huge domestic protests in Japan. In 1969 Okinawa was returned to Japan by the agreement in the Nixon-Sato communiqué which also emphasized the presence of the U.S. forces in Asia, and enhanced the alliance. The Nixon shocks⁷⁶ in 1971-1972 caused Japan to seriously mistrusts its relationship with the United States, yet the alliance was deliberately maintained. In 1978, for the first time, the U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation was announced and implemented. In 1981, under the U.S. strategies to contain the Soviet Union, Japan pledged to assume responsibility for sea-lane defense out to 1,000 nautical miles. Finally, by playing a critical role in maintaining peace and stability in the region, the U.S.-Japan alliance successfully contributed to the end of the Cold War in the Asia Pacific region.

⁷⁵ The burden sharing of the USFJ relocation costs from Okinawa to Guam was long argued between two countries, however, it was agreed upon in the *Roadmap* that out of the total \$10.27 billion costs, Japan provide \$6.09 billion and the U.S. provide the rest \$4.18 billion.

⁷⁶ The United States under the Nixon administration unilaterally, without any prior consultation with its allies in the region, decide to reconcile its relationship with Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and change the Cold War diplomacy by Nixon's surprising visit to PRC and subsequent normalization process. Japan as well as South Korea was shocked that the United States never informed them of its sudden policy change toward PRC.

Certainly the Cold War had enhanced the geo-strategic value of Japan as playing a critical role in the U.S. security strategy in Asia.⁷⁷ The security ties between the United States and Japan were essentially a result of the Cold War. In this context, the end of the Cold War brought about a new security perception in the region.⁷⁸ Instead of the strong bilateral alliance based on a clear common threat, the notion of “cooperative security” became more pervasive. Japan was seeking a more multilateral framework such as ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), and Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP).

The *Higuchi Report*⁷⁹ by the “Higuchi Commission,” the advisory group to the Prime Minister in August 1994, recommended that Japan should enhance its alliance with the United States. However, more emphasis was on the importance of multilateral security cooperation.⁸⁰ Patrick Cronin and Michael Green argued in their book *Redefining the U.S.-Japan Alliance* in 1994 that, “Tokyo is questioning the longevity and vitality of the bilateral alliance...the U.S.-Japan alliance is on shakier ground... All things being equal the U.S.-Japan alliance is Japan’s first choice, but there is a growing question about whether it should be the only choice.”⁸¹

Japan was questioning the longevity and vitality of the bilateral alliance with the U.S. and the alliance was on shaky ground. At the same time, the U.S. security policy toward Asia was also shifting. The U.S. began to reduce its troops from its forward bases in the region according to the *East Asia Strategy Initiative (EASI) I* of 1990.⁸² These withdrawals of U.S. forces in Asia were clearly understood as a weakening of the U.S. security commitment to its allies in the region such as Japan and South Korea. On the

⁷⁷ Yutaka Kawashima, *Japan’s Foreign Policy at the Crossroads: Challenges and Options for the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 24.

⁷⁸ Hiroshi Nakanishi, “The Japan-US Alliance and Japanese Domestic Politics: Sources of Change, Prospects for the Future,” in *The Future of America’s Alliances in Northeast Asia* (Stanford: Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2004), 111.

⁷⁹ Higuchi Report, *The Modality of the Security and Defense Capability of Japan: The Outlook for the 21st Century* (Tokyo, 1994).

⁸⁰ Patrick M. Cronin and Michael J. Green, *Redefining the U.S.-Japan Alliance: Tokyo’s National Defense Program* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 1994), 9.

⁸¹ Cronin and Green, 2.

⁸² U.S. DOD, *A Strategic Framework for the Asian Pacific Rim: Report to the Congress* (Washington, DC, 1990).

other hand, as the Cold War ended, trade and economy issues began to override security issues within the alliance; hence, Japan's defense cooperation with the United States could no longer counterbalance the growing trade frictions with the United States. Overall, the alliance was adrift.⁸³

However, the security environment in this period mainly contributed to restoring the diverging U.S.-Japan alliance. North Korea's nuclear development program (1992-1994) and missile tests (1998), in addition to the Taiwan Strait Crisis (1996) provided more rationales to strengthen the alliance. Most importantly, in this period Japan began to play a more active role in international security issues. Lessons from the Gulf War on "checkbook diplomacy" were critical in changing Japanese perception on participating actively in international affairs.

In this context, in Japan the new *National Defense Program Outline (NDPO)*⁸⁴ in 1994 clearly emphasized the significance of the Japan-U.S. security arrangements. On the U.S. side, the 1995 *East Asia Strategy Report (EASR)*⁸⁵ better known as the "Nye Initiative," changed the U.S. security policy in the region to maintain 100,000 troops in East Asia and Japan's active role in international security was recognized in the alliance.⁸⁶

The 1996 *U.S.-Japan Joint declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21st Century (Joint Declaration)*⁸⁷ decisively changed the alliance by enlarging its scope from narrow bilateral interests to more regional and global interests. In 1997, *The Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation (Defense Guidelines)* stressed the significance of cooperation

⁸³ Yoichi Funabashi, *Alliance Adrift* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999).

⁸⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *National Defense Program Outline in and after FY 1996* (Tokyo, 1995). The NDPO clearly emphasized the significance of the Japan-U.S. security arrangements by referring to it as "indispensable to Japan's security and will also continue to play a key role in achieving peace and stability in the surrounding regions of Japan and establishing a more stable security environment."

⁸⁵ U.S. DOD, *U.S. Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region* (Washington, DC: 1995).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 10. "Our security alliance with Japan is the linchpin of United States security policy in Asia... Japan's new global role involves greater Japanese contribution to regional and global stability...Japan's continuing close cooperation with the United States in a strategic partnership is conducive to regional peace and stability and supports broad mutual global objectives."

⁸⁷ U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on Security: Alliance for the 21st Century. April 17, 1996.

in “situations in areas surrounding Japan.”⁸⁸ Again by broadening the scope of the alliance from defending Japan to the security of the region, the United States and Japan strategically incorporated their national interests within the alliance. Consequently, despite challenges to the U.S.-Japan alliance in the early 1990s after the end of the Cold War, the U.S.-Japan alliance was successfully enhanced and prepared to change the alliance to a “regional and global alliance.”

Accordingly, it is important to note the differences between the two alliances.⁸⁹ While the U.S.-ROK alliance had not changed much from focusing on the North Korean threat from the beginning of the alliance until after the end of the Cold War,⁹⁰ the U.S.-Japan alliance successfully managed to adapt itself to security environment changes since the end of the Cold War by broadening the scope of the alliance. Moreover, while the *Joint Declaration* and the new *Defense Guidelines* between the United States and Japan in the mid-1990s became the turning point to revitalize the U.S.-Japan alliance, there were no serious efforts within the United States and South Korean governments to reconsider the rationale and the vision of the U.S.-ROK alliance. These rather different developments in their security relationships with the United States particularly after the end of the Cold War, were the main causes of later differences in their recognition of U.S. forces’ transformations in each country.

B. THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION

1. The U.S.-Japan Alliance in the 21st Century

Imbalanced developments in both the U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliances during the 1990s became worse at the beginning of the 21st century.⁹¹ South Korean president Kim Dae-Jung’s Sunshine policy finally brought about the historic Pyungyang Summit

⁸⁸ The Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation. October 6, 1997.

⁸⁹ From the starting point the U.S. security policies toward South Korea and Japan were different. There was fundamental difference in the U.S. security commitment to each country. The U.S. commitment in South Korea developed from the Korean War and until recently the basic purpose of the U.S. security policy was mainly to deter the North Korean threat and was heavily confined in the Korean peninsula. By contrast, from the very beginning the U.S. security policy in Japan was more comprehensive than in Korea. By defending Japan from a Soviet military attack the United States deterred the proliferation of Soviet Communism in the region.

⁹⁰ Charles M. Perry and Toshi Yoshihara, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Preparing for Korean Reconciliation and Beyond* (Massachusetts: Fidelity Press, 2003), xiii.

⁹¹ Kurt M. Campbell, “America’s Asia Strategy during the Bush Administration,” in *The Future of America’s Alliances in Northeast Asia* (Standford: Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2004), 30-31.

between the two leaders of the Koreas in June 2000, and a subsequent reconciliation process in inter-Korean relations. Kim's successor, president Roh Moo-Hyun consistently supported and maintained the Sunshine policy toward North Korea despite strong opposition from South Korean conservatives as well as from the United States. Meanwhile, the Bush administration in the United States had different views and approaches toward both Koreas from its predecessor. The Clinton Administration's "engagement" policy toward North Korea abruptly turned into a "containment" or "malign neglect" policy.⁹² A rift between the two old strong allies was further aggravated by their different perceptions on North Korea.

While the U.S.-ROK alliance was adrift, the U.S.-Japan alliance became even stronger. The challenge from the rising power of China consistently remained the main impetus for the U.S.-Japan alliance in the 21st century. Realistically, the United States regarded China as a "peer competitor" challenging its global hegemony, and Japan regarded China as a regional rival economically and militarily. On the other hand, North Korea became a more imminent and clear threat to the alliance. North Korea's consistent development of nuclear weapons and means of delivery justified the cooperation of constructing a regional missile defense system by the United States and Japan. In this respect, the U.S.-Japan alliance was critical to both the United States and Japan to cope with China as well as North Korea. Moreover, the alliance enabled the United States to maintain its strong influence in the Asia Pacific region and to Japan the alliance became the foundation to expand its role in the international community.⁹³

Meanwhile, the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001 compelled further enhancement of the U.S.-Japan security relationships.⁹⁴ Japan offered

⁹² Won-Hyuk Lim, "North Korea's Missile Tests: Malign Neglect Meets Brinkmanship," *The Brookings Institution*, July 6, 2006. Regarding the shift of Clinton Administration's Engagement to Bush's Containment, see John Feffer, *North Korea/ South Korea: U.S. Policies and the Korean Peninsula* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003)

⁹³ Kawashima, 45. "...as long as the U.S. adheres to the strategic notion that its continued presence is essential to prevent the domination of Asia through coercive means by a power that is hostile to the US, the US-Japanese alliance will remain what often is described as the lynchpin of U.S. security policy in Asia and the Pacific."

⁹⁴ A Statement by Japan's Prime Minister Koizumi in a September 19, 2001 press conference entitled "Japan's measures in response to the simultaneous terrorist attacks in the United States," clearly shows that Japan will actively participate on the U.S. led war on terrorists.

http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/koizumispeech/2001/0919terosoti_e.html (accessed October 21, 2006).

its full support and assistance to the U.S. in its war against terrorism. In Afghanistan, Japan dispatched its Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) first to escort U.S. ships but later to provide rear-area support in the Indian Ocean. During the war in Afghanistan, Japan passed an anti-terrorism bill to enable the SDF to provide non-combat and humanitarian assistance to the United States and to the multinational forces. Despite massive domestic protests, the Japanese government sent the SDF to Iraq, which was still a combat zone. Once again war contingency bills were passed to support U.S. operations. Therefore, Japan's active participation in the U.S. war on terrorism further strengthened the alliance, but at the same time it also ensured Japan's increasing assertiveness to play an active role in international affairs.⁹⁵

Two strategies were contained in Japan's active participation in the U.S. global war on terror. First, by supporting the United States, Japan strongly desired to maintain a firm U.S.-Japan security relationship. Second, by actively participating in international security cooperation, Japan wanted to be a more important member in the international community. Therefore, Japan's willingness to play an active role in the international community influenced the U.S.-Japan alliance to expand its scope more globally. During the Cold War the U.S.-Japan alliance mainly focused on the security of Japan. After the end of the Cold War, by overcoming a period of drift, the alliance expanded its role to a more regional alliance. Finally, in the post-September 11 era, the U.S.-Japan alliance is trying to transform itself into a global alliance.⁹⁶

By this time it was clear that even before the agreements on transforming the alliance, the U.S.-Japan alliance was heading toward a regional and global alliance. In this context, there is an important difference between the U.S.-ROK and the U.S.-Japan alliances that is contained in the original purposes of the U.S. forces' realignment processes in each country. In South Korea, the main purpose of the USFK realignment is to change and expand its role in the region and to some extent beyond the region, based

⁹⁵ Arpita Mathur, "Japan's Changing Role in the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance," *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 4 (2004): 509.

⁹⁶ Chul-Hee Park, "Japan's Security Policy Choice and South Korea's Policy Options (Ilboneui anboseontaekha hangukeui jinlo)," *EAI NSP Report* (2005): 8.

on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Therefore, strategic flexibility is considered the most important concept in the overall transformation of the USFK as well as in transforming the U.S.-ROK alliance.

The situation is different in the U.S.-Japan alliance. As examined, the U.S.-Japan alliance, in many aspects, had already expanded its role into the region and beyond the region, and was engaged in partially carrying out these extended roles. In the region, the USFJ is now considered, within the alliance but also to other regional actors, as the U.S. military presence to check China's military buildup in the region, rather than for defending Japan from an external military threat. Besides, it is less convincing that the JSDF cannot defend its own country without U.S. support, as the threat from the Soviet Union has disappeared. In terms of North Korea's threat, Japan's own defense capability exceeds North Korea's conventional weapons, except for its nuclear weapons.⁹⁷ Therefore, considering the current status of the alliance, and also Japan's active interests in expanding the alliance, the need for strategic flexibility as a compelling reason to expand the role of U.S. forces in the region cannot be as strongly defended as in the U.S.-ROK alliance. Instead, the core of the transformation in Japan is the substantial change of the U.S. force structure as well as the alliance structure, to more effectively carry out the regional or global role that was already largely implemented since the revitalization of the alliance over the last decade.

2. Transforming the U.S.-Japan Alliance

Similar to the USFK, the USFJ is also under a transformation process originally initiated by the U.S. military transformation and GPR. The realignment of the USFJ discusses the changes in roles, missions, and capabilities of the U.S. forces but also of the JSDF, to respond effectively to diverse challenges in a well-coordinated manner. It is also enhancing interoperability between U.S. and Japan's Self Defense Force. However,

⁹⁷ Japan's defense budget in 2005 was \$42.1 billion, which is the largest in the region. There is no official data on the North Korean annual defense budget, but it is expected to be around \$5 billion. "U.S. Defense budget, South Korea's 75 times (Mi gukbangbi hangukeu 75bae)," *Yonhap News*, October 15, 2006.

the transformation is not confined to the realignment of USFJ. The United States and Japan are constructing their national security and defense policy together, in the context of changing regional and global security circumstances.⁹⁸

Although the U.S.-Japan alliance became stronger than ever at the advent of the new century, both countries recognized that they must transform their security relationship based on more effective and advanced alliance system in order to carry out regional and global roles. In the Security Council Committee (SCC) on December 2002, the alliance transformation was first agreed upon by launching the Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) between the two countries. Then, through vigorous and intensive transformation negotiation, the U.S. and Japan announced a series of joint statements during 2005-2006. Based on the SCC, they announced three major agreements on transforming the alliance:

- a. U.S.-Japan SCC Joint Statement (Joint Statement) on February 19, 2005
- b. U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future (Midterm Report) on October 29, 2005
- c. U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation (Roadmap) on May 1, 2006

By transforming the U.S.-Japan alliance through these agreements, two main goals are established. The first is to further enhance the capabilities of the alliance to cope with regional and global security issues, and the second is to further strengthen U.S.-Japan security and defense cooperation.

The *Joint Statement* in 2005, just like the *Joint Declaration* in 1996, became a basis for the future alliance transformation. At first the U.S. and Japan shared the same views of the current security environment affecting the alliance, such as international terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), modernization of military capabilities in the region, and North Korea returning to the Six-Party talks. Then, the *Joint Statement* established a total of 18 (12 regional and 6 global-level)

⁹⁸ Hwa-Seop Song, “Transforming the U.S.-Japan Alliance to the Normal Alliance (Miil dongmaengeu byunhyukgwa botongdongmaengwha)” *Defense Policy Research* (2006): 45.

common strategic objectives for the alliance. In the first step to transform the alliance, agreement on the objectives for the alliance became the foundation for the transformation process and for the future of an effective and capable alliance.⁹⁹

To achieve common strategic objectives, the roles, missions and capabilities of the U.S. forces and JSDF were reexamined and agreed upon through the *Midterm Report* in October titled *U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future*. Newly defined roles, missions and capabilities focused on::

- a. Bilateral cooperation in international activities such as the fight against terrorism, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), assistance to Iraq, and disaster relief following the tsunami in the Indian Ocean and the earthquake in South Asia.
- b. Japan's December 2004 National Defense Program Guidelines.
- c. Progress in ballistic missile defense (BMD) cooperation.
- d. Japan's legislation to deal with contingencies.
- e. The SDF's planned transition to a new joint operations posture.
- f. The transformation and global posture realignment of U.S. forces.

Even before the agreement on the USFK's strategic flexibility became an issue between the United States and South Korea, because of its implications for USFK becoming a regional force, it is clear with the above two agreements in 2005 the United States and Japan finally and officially defined and announced the U.S.-Japan alliance as a regional as well as a global security alliance. It is obvious that the United States and Japan are willing to transform the alliance to a global alliance by expanding the role of USFJ and JSDF to all the international security activities such as counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation operations (e.g., PSI).¹⁰⁰ Most importantly, unlike the U.S. and South Korean relationship, there was no different perception between the United States and Japan on the active role of the U.S.-Japan alliance within the region and also beyond the region. They shared common national interests in this extended alliance relationship. The common objectives, roles and missions clearly reflect the both countries' broader interests within the alliance beyond defense of Japan. Consequently, while the transformation of USFK was perceived by South Koreans as a factor further deteriorating

⁹⁹ U.S.-Japan SCC Joint Statement. February 19, 2005.

¹⁰⁰ U.S.-Japan SCC Document, U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future. October 29, 2005.

the relationship between the United States and South Korea, in Japan, the transformation of the U.S.-Japan alliance to regional and global alliance was certainly recognized within both countries as contributing to a more advanced and effective alliance.

3. Realignment of the USFJ

Under the common strategic objectives and with newly defined roles, missions and capabilities, the details of realignment were agreed upon between the two countries. In May 2006, the transformation roadmap was completed. The *Roadmap* confirmed the specifics of the realignments in the U.S.-Japan force structure. Important changes in the force structures are:

- a. Realignment on Okinawa: construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility, relocating 8,000 marines to Guam by 2014, and returning lands of the Futenma and Kadena bases.
- b. Transforming the U.S. Army command and control structure at Camp Zama. Establishing the Headquarters of the Ground SDF Central Readiness Force.
- c. Relocating Air SDF Air Defense Command (ADC) to Yokota Air base.
- d. Relocating Carrier Air Wing from Atsugi Air Facility to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni.
- e. Deploying a new U.S. X-Band radar system to Air SDF Shariki Base for Missile Defense.
- f. Relocating aircraft training sites from Kadena, Misawa, and Iwakuni to designated SDF bases.

Two rather distinguished purposes were contained in the realignment implementation. One is to reduce the burdens on local communities in Okinawa, which began roughly after the Okinawa rape incident in 1995, through the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) process. The Roadmap reflected many of the previous agreements from the *SACO Final Report* in 1996,¹⁰¹ such as returning Futenma air station and other bases to Okinawa local community. Realignment in Okinawa was based more on political decisions than a military strategy, in order to induce Japanese public support for the strong alliance.

The other purpose of the realignment, which has more implications for the actual transformation of the alliance, was to enhance the overall force capabilities of the U.S.-

¹⁰¹ U.S.-Japan Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) Final Report. December 2, 1996.

Japan alliance and increase the interoperability between the USFJ and JSDF. According to the Roadmap, Camp Zama will be transformed to a joint command post for the USFJ in case of the military contingency in the region. Thus, the U.S. Army command and control structure will be transformed and also the headquarters of the Ground SDF Central Readiness Force¹⁰² will be established in Camp Zama. The relocating of Air SDF Air Defense Command to Yokota Air Base and establishing a bilateral joint operations coordination center (BJOCC) will certainly strengthen the air defense capability of the U.S. and Japanese forces. In addition, the deployment of a new U.S. X-Band radar system in Air SDF Shariki base will also enhance the U.S. and Japan's cooperation on missile defense capability.

It is clear that the core of the realignment in Japan is meant, by relocating and integrating the U.S. and Japanese forces, to increase the interoperability of the two forces as well as their overall military capabilities, thus to build more efficient joint forces in case of regional security contingencies or any other security purposes around the world. There is an obvious reason that changing force structure to more agile and flexible under the strategic flexibility policy, is not emphasized in Japan's realignment process. It is because the basic force structure of USFJ is, unlikely to USFK which are mostly Army, comprised of mostly Marine expeditionary forces (the 3MEF in Okinawa) and also Air Force and Navy, which has more maneuvering capabilities than Army.¹⁰³ Therefore, to perform a regional role, the USFJ does not require an additional transformation for its force structure as does in the USFK.

A thorough examination of both the USFK and USFJ transformation clearly shows the different emphasis. In Japan, the realignment has been used to emphasize the interoperability and integration between the USFJ and JSDF. Moving the Air SDF Air Defense Command into the U.S. Yokota air base and creating a new Ground SDF Central Readiness Force Command in Camp Zama are good examples. In South Korea, there will be less actual increase in interoperability or coordination between the USFK and ROK forces through the realignment. In fact, in South Korea, through the troop

¹⁰² Creating Ground SDF Central Readiness Force HQs was initiated Japan's 2004 NDPG.

¹⁰³ Before the realignments, the USFK consisted of 28,300 Army and 8,700 Air Force, and the USFJ consisted of 20,000 Marine Corps, 14,000 Air Force and 6,000 Navy.

reduction, ten major missions and also wartime OPCON transfer, the transformation of USFK rather emphasizes the “Koreanization of South Korean Defense.” On the other hand, through relocation and changing force structure, the transformation will increase the mobility and efficiency of the USFK as a future regional force. Both the Koreanization of South Korean Defense and a mobile and efficient USFK will eventually contribute to the enhancement of the USFK’s strategic flexibility.

From the U.S. perspective, together with USFK’s regional role, increasing the overall force capabilities and interoperability of USFJ and JSDF will eventually increase the strategic flexibility of U.S. forces in the region. Therefore, the realignment of USFJ also has significant influence on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. Moreover, when the two U.S. forces actually begin to perform regional missions together, after the completion of realignments, the interoperability between the USFK and USFJ will be greatly emphasized and developed. Some factors in the current realignments such as increasing USFK’s PAC-3 missile deployments in Osan and Kunsan, emphasizing the importance of the Navy and Air Force in South Korea, and transforming the U.S. Army command and control structure to a joint command post in Zama Japan in case of regional contingencies, will clearly contribute to the future enhancement in the interoperability between the USFK and USFJ.

C. JAPAN’S REACTION TO THE TRANSFORMATION

Before examining Japan’s policy reaction to the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation, it is necessary to go over Japan’s domestic responses regarding the realignment of USFJ compared to South Korea. Some similarities can be found between both countries’ domestic debates against proposed changes in U.S. force structure. During the negotiations on realignment, the United States and Japan had profound difficulties reaching agreements on base relocation issues. As 70% of the U.S. bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa, local communities in Okinawa were strongly opposed to relocating bases but also to building new facilities for USFJ within their communities. Relocation of the Futenma Air Base is the best example.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, regarding the issue of sharing the base relocation costs, both governments were decidedly

¹⁰⁴ Sheila A. Smith, “Shifting Terrain: The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia,” *East West Center Special Report* no. 8, March 2006. 8.

confrontational, with neither offering concessions. Although it was agreed that the U.S. would take 41% and Japan 59% although initially the U.S. requested that Japan take 75%, still many Japanese strongly criticized their government for accepting too much of the burden.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, the South Korean government met strong opposition from local communities in Pyungtaek area when it tried to expand Camp Humphreys in order to relocate Yongsan garrison and other U.S. bases from Seoul. The government also received heavy criticism from its people when it made the decision to pay all expenses for relocating the Yongsan base to the Osan-Pyungtaek area. Therefore, both countries went through similar domestic debates regarding base relocation and burden sharing issues.

Moreover, it is imperative to add here that there are also crucial parallels between Japan and South Korea regarding the fear of entrapment in U.S. conflicts in the region. The fear of “abandonment” and also the “entrapment” potential in their alliance relationship with the United States has a long history – since the inception of the U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliances in the 1950s.¹⁰⁶ Within the recent realignment process in Japan it is hard to find the serious domestic discussions that prevail in South Korea regarding the fear of “entrapment” in a potential U.S.-China Taiwan Strait conflict.¹⁰⁷ However, while South Korea was largely dominated by the fear of U.S. abandonment throughout its alliance with the United States, Japan constantly experienced both abandonment and entrapment within the U.S.-Japan alliance. Although Japan is expanding its security roles through enhancing the U.S.-Japan alliance, considering Japan’s WWII legacy and its pacifism in general, the Japanese public’s foremost priority remains avoiding war. Within Japan’s security interests, avoiding war entrapment is as important as avoiding U.S. abandonment.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ U.S.-Japan SCC Document, U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation.

¹⁰⁶ Regarding the issue of South Korea and Japan’s abandonment and entrapment see, Victor D. Cha, “Abandonment, Entrapment, and Neoclassical Realism in Asia: The United States, Japan, and Korea,” *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 2000): 261-291.

¹⁰⁷ As discussed before, Japan’s domestic debates regarding current USFJ realignment mostly deal with the burden sharing issue.

¹⁰⁸ William P. Rapp, “Path Diverging? The Next Decade in the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance,” *USAWC Strategic Studies Institute* (January 2004): 36.

Accordingly, taking these similarities in both countries' domestic responses and entrapment fear into account, Japan's policy reactions toward the U.S. military transformation as well as the overall alliance transformation have great implications for South Korea. They offer valuable insights for South Korean policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy in terms of strengthening the security relationship with the United States. Three important Japanese policy reactions relevant to South Korea's situation are examined.

First of all, it is important to note that Japan adequately and effectively developed its own security policies in response to the changes in U.S. security policy. Moreover, not only the continuation but also enhancing the U.S.-Japan alliance was always one of the top priorities in Japan's policies toward the United States. In the mid-1990s, the U.S. EASR I and Japan NDPO respectively contributed to recover and enhance the drifting U.S.-Japan alliance. Since the September 11 attack, as the U.S. GPR brought about a transformation to the U.S. military presence in East Asia, Japan's new National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG)¹⁰⁹ was announced in 2004. Japan's new NDPG supported the broad theme of the U.S. GPR by strengthening the alliance and increasing its defense capabilities.¹¹⁰ NDPG clearly defined global and regional threats in the new security environment surrounding Japan. It recognized proliferation of WMD and ballistic missiles, and international terrorist activities as the main global threats. Regional threats are from the unpredictability and uncertainty on the Korean Peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait in the light of North Korea's developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, as well as China's military modernization. Against the global threat, NDPG emphasized the role of the United States as the superpower fostering international cooperation, and against regional threats it emphasized the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance.¹¹¹ Through the

¹⁰⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, *National Defense Program Guideline for FY 2005 and After* (Tokyo, 2004). Similar to Higuchi Report, there was the Araki Report, *Japan's Vision for Future Security and Defense Capabilities* (Tokyo, 2004) prior to the NDPG. It recommended a new defense and security strategy for Japan to adapt to the post-September 11 and the 21st century threats and challenges.

¹¹⁰ U.S.-Japan SCC Joint Statement. February 19, 2005. "The Ministers expressed their support and appreciation for each other's efforts to develop their respective security and defense policies. Japan's new National Defense Program Guidelines."

¹¹¹ Japan's NDPG 2004, "Close cooperative relationship between Japan and the United States, based on the Japan-US security arrangements, continues to play a key role for the security of Japan as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region."

2004 NDPG, just like the 1994 NDPO which implicated Japan's inclination toward the United States, Japan once again emphasized the importance of the alliance by recognizing the U.S. as a global security partner in the new century.

Secondly, by active participation and with close coordination, Japan was able to establish not just an agreement on the USFJ realignment, but a step by step alliance transformation process with the United States. The Joint Statement in February 2005 suggested broader visions and clear goals for the alliance by establishing strategic objectives on regional and global levels. Then, under the strategic objectives, the roles, missions and capabilities of the alliance were redefined through the Midterm Report document in October 2005. In order to achieve the new roles, missions, and capabilities, the interoperability factor between the two forces was highlighted within the defense cooperation of the alliance. And finally, the details of implementing the realignment, first reducing the burden in Okinawa and then upgrading the force structure, were agreed upon by the Roadmap in May 2006. Basically, both countries agreed upon the principles of the transformation and based on those principles, the details of the implementation process followed.

Compare to the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation process, the U.S.-ROK alliance transformation process was more one-sided and also ad-hoc. There was no corresponding defense policy in South Korea to Japan's NDPG when the U.S. GPR was announced. Even though the U.S.-ROK FOTA talks (2003-2004) were on process, the U.S. arbitrarily decided to withdraw a part of the USFK to redeploy in Iraq in 2004. The FOTA talks mainly discussed issues regarding the details of USFK's realignment and never covered the common objectives or roles and missions of the changing alliance. The core concept of the transformation, "strategic flexibility" was agreed upon in 2006, two years after the realignment agreement through the FOTA.

Lastly, it is important to understand that the revitalization and enhancement in the U.S.-Japan alliance was only feasible because of Japan's endless efforts to maintain common national interests within the alliance. A healthy alliance is not solely based on common threat perceptions: it is rather based on broad areas of common national

interests. In this regard, the most important features in the success of the U.S.-Japan alliance came from sharing and developing their common national interests and values in the new security environment.

Since the mid-1990s the U.S. and Japan successfully expanded the alliance to a more regional and to more global alliance based on their needs and common interests. Through the Defense Guidelines in 1997, Japan was able to strengthen bilateral security cooperation with the United States and also expand its security influence to the region. After September 11, by Japan's active participation in U.S. security interests, the alliance enhanced security cooperation and coordination beyond the region (Far East), to the Middle East and the Indian Ocean. Japan's efforts to share common security interests with the United States, by supporting U.S. roles in international issues, made this expansion of the alliance possible. Japan was aware of the U.S. need for international support on its global war on terror. Moreover, Japan also could achieve recognition from the international community through active participation in international affairs. In this context, the U.S. recognized Japan as its "global partner" and both the United States and Japan moved toward transforming the alliance into a global alliance.¹¹²

Therefore, even though the transformation of the alliance was initiated by the U.S. military transformation, Japan successfully was able to insert its national security interests into the alliance transformation. By contrast, despite the significance of the U.S.-ROK alliance for South Korea's security (in matters of imminent security, South Korea has more reason than Japan to pursue an alliance relationship with the U.S.), South Korea failed to incorporate its national interests into the alliance transformation. Considering the current direction of the transformation, in the near future the U.S.-Japan alliance will transform itself into a more effective and advanced global alliance. By contrast, the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance is full of uncertainty.

In sum, Japan's overall reaction to the U.S. security policy change clearly shows Japan's efforts to actively interact with the United States by maintaining close cooperation and coordination. Also, by sharing common security interests with the United States, Japan develops its own security policy in ways intended to correlate with

¹¹² During testimony before the House Committee on International Relations, Sub-committee on Asia and the Pacific in May 26, 2005, Christopher R. Hill called Japan a "global partner."

U.S. policy. Through the transformation process Japan was able to strengthen its security relationship with the United States in concrete ways while at the same time increasing the overall force capabilities of the JSDF.

D. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH KOREA

Through the overview of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation and the reaction from Japan, some vital implications for South Korea can be examined in terms of its security interests, the alliance relationship with the United States, and also its regional relationships. As the consequence of the transformation, the U.S.-Japan alliance will expand the role of the alliance; increase the JSDF's overall force capabilities; and strengthen the U.S.-Japan security relationship. These three factors will have great relevance for South Korea, especially facing the U.S. strategic flexibility policy.

The most significant implication of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation for South Korea is this: as the U.S.-Japan alliance is successfully changing its structure to a regional and global security alliance, South Korea will be under strong pressure from the United States to develop the U.S.-ROK alliance in the same direction. Moreover, as the U.S. forces' realignments in both countries develop, it is possible that the linkage between the USFJ and USFK could be intensified in order to carry out each one's regional role more effectively. In this sense, the development of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation will further promote the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea.

Considering the current situation in South Korea, as the hostile North Korea still remains as the primary threat to the alliance, the United States will not try to officially change the U.S.-ROK alliance to a regional alliance in the near term. It is clear, however, that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy is gradually paving the way for the U.S.-ROK to change into the regional security alliance. In order to strengthen the alliance relationship with the United States, South Korea might follow the direction of Japan and enlarge the role of the alliance. As a result, the U.S.-ROK alliance would be strengthened, and therefore the ROK-Japan security relationship would be much closer. In this context, not only the USFK and USFJ but possibly the ROK forces and JSDF could together perform

a regional role based on a strong U.S.-ROK-Japan security relationship.¹¹³ Nevertheless, unlike Japan, South Korea must consider how this development could influence its relationship with North Korea as well as China. Moreover, China is also perceived differently within the two alliances.¹¹⁴ Japan evaluated China's military modernization as a threat and determined to be with the U.S. in its foreign policy toward China.

It is also important to note that through the alliance transformation, Japan is trying to increase its own military capabilities. Unlike the USFK realignment in South Korea, which only discusses the changes in USFK -not ROK forces-, the USFJ realignment includes the changes in JSDF as well. Through the actual realignment of the USFJ and JDSF, it is certain that JSDF's overall military capability, particularly missile defense and joint operation capabilities, will be enhanced. As mentioned before, one of the primary objectives in the NDPG 2004 was to increase Japan's own defense capabilities. In this regard, the Midterm document clearly indicated that promoting not only the U.S. GPR but also Japan's NDPG is one of the key missions in the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation.

Japan's efforts to increase its military capabilities are certainly not welcomed in the region, especially by China and North Korea, but from South Korea's perspective as well. Mainly due to the animosities and distrusts from historical colonial legacies in the region, many Koreans as well as Chinese perceive Japan's increasing military capabilities as a sign of the revival of military nationalism. Considering these regional perceptions on Japan's increasing military capabilities, there are possibilities that developing Japan's military capabilities through the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation could initiate an arms race in the region. This will negatively influence the security situation on the Korean peninsula as well as in the region.

It is a clear consequence that the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation will enhance Japan's security relationship with the United States. In this context, South Korea has mixed feelings on the strengthened security relationship between the United States and

¹¹³ Victor D. Cha, "Values after Victory: The Future of U.S.-Japan-Korean Relations," *CSIS Pacnet* 30, August 2, 2002.

¹¹⁴ Robert Dujarric, "U.S. Military Presence and Northeast Asian Regional Stability," *Korea Observer* 36, no. 3 (2005): 453.

Japan. On the one hand, a strong U.S.-Japan alliance could bring about regional stability under U.S. influence, and could also confirm strong support to South Korea in case of contingencies on the peninsula. On the other hand, however, many South Koreans are anxious that the U.S.-ROK alliance is becoming less important to the United States as its relationship with Japan is growing stronger. South Koreans feel strong competition from Japan as one of the two U.S. security allies in Northeast Asia.¹¹⁵ Under the current development of South Korea and Japan's imbalanced relationship with the United States, as for South Korea the U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliance is easily perceived as a zero-sum relationship. Therefore, in the midst of the current delicate relationship between the United States and South Korea caused by the U.S. strategic flexibility policy, the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance could put more pressure on South Korea, in terms of its security relationship with the United States. South Korea's worst scenario in the security relationship with the United States would be the U.S.-ROK alliance becoming subordinate to the U.S.-Japan alliance. This explains South Korea's negative reaction to strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Besides, for South Korea, it would be unwise to neglect the regional implications of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation in terms of expanding and strengthening its alliance role, and increasing the capabilities of JSDF. Realistically, China perceives the U.S.-Japan security enhancement in light of checking its own expansion in the region: thus China will be reluctant to see the U.S.-ROK alliance following the same direction.¹¹⁶ As many elements of the USFJ's realignment directly or indirectly target North Korea, North Korea is also heavily condemning the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan security relationship. Considering the current security environment surrounding the peninsula, South Korea could not simply disregard these negative responses from China and North Korea. From South Korea's perspective, the inter-Korean reconciliation, China's leverage on North Korea, and also the growing Chinese economic relationship with South Korea are no less important to the U.S.-ROK alliance.

¹¹⁵ Norman D. Levin, *Do the Ties Still Bind?: The U.S.-ROK Security Relationship after 9/11* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2004), 67. "South Koreans have deep rooted perception that it receives "inferior" treatment to other U.S. allies, particularly Japan."

¹¹⁶ "U.S.-Japan-South Korea Military Coordination Targets China, North Korea," *Japan Times*, March 9, 2006.

In conclusion, although the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation provides a good example of strengthening the security relationship with the United States, it is hard to deny that it also contains negative implications for South Korea regarding its relationship with other regional actors. More pressure on South Korea is expected in terms of expanding the alliance role and also maintaining balance with the U.S.-Japan alliance. It has significant impacts on inter-Korean relations and also South Korea's relationship with China and Japan. Overall, in many ways the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation will underscore U.S. strategic flexibility toward South Korea. More specifics regarding these implications of the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation will be discussed in the next two chapters in the process of analyzing the implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy.

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IV. THE IMPLICATIONS OF U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY FOR SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine the implications of U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security and discover the gaps between the United States and South Korea regarding this issue. This process will give better understanding for South Korea's policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy, which is addressed in the next chapter. This chapter will primarily focus on the aspects of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy that could cause critical consequences to South Korean security. However, before going into the actual implications of U.S. strategic flexibility policy for South Korean security, it is necessary to go over the regional actors' perspectives on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. As mentioned before, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy would not only transform the U.S.-ROK alliance but also could profoundly change the regional security environment. In this respect, China's, Japan's, and North Korea's views on U.S. strategic flexibility are examined.

In order to analyze the implications of the strategic flexibility for South Korean security, four critical aspects of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea, are assessed. The first aspect is the implications of USFK being a regional force, since the previous chapters demonstrated that the agreement on strategic flexibility will transform the USFK into a regional force. Indeed, through the realignment process, the USFK is currently changing its force structure to a rapidly deployable force in case of a regional contingency. Changing the role of the USFK will change the characteristics of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Eventually, when the inter-Korean reconciliation proceeds and the North Korean threat is significantly reduced, the regional U.S.-ROK alliance may request more of ROK forces' participation in regional affairs together with the USFK. Secondly, the USFK deterrence capability toward North Korea will be assessed. Many South Koreans fear that through the realignment process, by reducing U.S. troops to 25,000 and relocating U.S. bases near the DMZ to further south of the Han River, the U.S. deterrence capabilities toward North Korea will be severely weakened. However, this chapter's analysis shows that U.S. deterrence capabilities seem to be less affected by the strategic flexibility of USFK. The third aspect of strategic flexibility will be the

China factor. It is the most debated issue in South Korea regarding the strategic flexibility of USFK. Does the U.S. strategic flexibility policy mainly intended to contain China in the region? Will USFK strategic flexibility cause South Korea's unintended involvement in potential military conflicts in the Taiwan Strait between the U.S. and China? Overall, it is hard to deny the increasing possibilities with regard to both these issues, yet it is the alliance itself rather than strategic flexibility that would cause South Korea's entanglement to the potential Taiwan Strait conflict. The final aspect to be examined is the possibility of an arms race in the region caused by the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Northeast Asia is already the most heavily armed region in the world. It is conceivable that the strategic flexibility of the USFK could bring about a potential arms race among the major powers in the region, mainly between China and Japan, which could consequently cause high military tensions and instabilities in the region.

After examining these four aspects of U.S. strategic flexibility, the latter part of the chapter centers on the gaps between the United States and South Korea regarding the issue of strategic flexibility. There are apparently different views between the two countries about the regional role of the USFK. Under the U.S. Military Transformation and Global Defense Posture Review (GPR), the United States is changing USFK into an agile and flexible expeditionary force. However, currently South Korea is reluctant to accept USFK being used as a regional force as well as the alliance becoming a regional alliance similar to the U.S.-Japan alliance. Then what caused this difference between two old allies? It is argued in this chapter that this perception gap between the United States and South Korea fundamentally stems from two factors. The first factor is each others rather different perceptions of and policies toward major actors in the region, such as North Korea, Japan and China. The second factor is their different ideas about the rationale for and the vision of the alliance. Those two factors are discussed as the primary reasons for the diverging perceptions on strategic flexibility.

A. PERSPECTIVES OF THE REGIONAL ACTORS

In order to analyze the implications of the strategic flexibility policy, it is important to understand the perceptions of the major players in the region on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward the Korean peninsula. Among the regional actors, China, North Korea, and Japan's perspectives are crucial.

1. China

China's perceptions of the USFK's changing roles are the most significant factor for the future security environment surrounding the peninsula, considering the characteristics of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Historically, China has compelling strategic interests in maximizing its influence over the Korean peninsula. Nevertheless, since the beginning of the 1970s when China reconciled its relationship with the United States until now, China has perceived the U.S.-ROK alliance as the status quo on the peninsula. There was no official announcement from Beijing regarding the issue of the strategic flexibility of USFK.¹¹⁷ However, China is certainly keeping an eye on the realignments of the U.S. forces in Korea and Japan, and how those realignments will influence the Taiwan issue. Lately, China has criticized the U.S.-Japan alliance on their contingency plans to intervene in the Taiwan Strait.¹¹⁸

For now, the argument on strategic flexibility and its implications has not developed as fully in China as it has in South Korea. China does not perceive the realignment of the USFK as primarily containing itself.¹¹⁹ In the near future, however, it is likely that China would seek to block U.S.-led initiatives that could undermine China's security as well as reduce its influence on the peninsula. According to some policy specialists in Beijing and Shanghai, Chinese leaders are worried about the potential USFK relocation to the Pyongtaek area, near the ROK Navy 2nd Fleet Command on the Yellow Sea just across from Qingdao, which is home to the Chinese headquarters of the North Sea Fleet and a major naval base.¹²⁰ Although China does not recognize the notion of strategic flexibility as a direct threat, the creation of a large U.S. base near China's major sea lane of communication seems to be a great concern to China.

¹¹⁷ Regarding questions on USFK's strategic flexibility from the press, the Chinese Ambassador in South Korea cautiously said that, "I hope they will not act to the detriment of stability and peace in Northeast Asia." "Chinese Ambassador Cautious on U.S. Military Flexibility," *Korea Times*, March 22, 2006

¹¹⁸ Since the announcement in 1997 U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines, China largely condemned the U.S.-Japan's "cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan" that implies potential intervention in China's Taiwan Strait disputes with Taiwan.

¹¹⁹ Yong-Seop Han, "The Realignment of USFK and South Korea's New Security Strategy (Juhanmigun jaebaechiwa 21segi hangukeu shinanbojeonlak gaenym)," *EAI NSP Report 3* (2005): 6.

¹²⁰ Charles M. Perry and others, *Alliance Diversification and the Future of the U.S.-Korean Security Relationship* (Massachusetts: Merrill Press, 2004), 138.

Although China does not specifically respond to all the U.S. military transformation efforts in the region, during the last few decades it has been increasing its military spending to modernize its forces. Recently, the United States and China maintained a cooperative position on the peninsula by coping with North Korea's nuclear development. However, China will likely oppose the USFK as well as USFJ's roles and missions on regional security issues, especially when they become U.S.-Japan-ROK military cooperation applied to a Taiwan Strait contingency.

2. North Korea

North Korea's reaction to the strategic flexibility of USFK is very clear. For a long time North Korea insisted upon withdrawal of the USFK by arguing that the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty is an illegal treaty and condemned U.S. imperialism on the Korean peninsula. According to North Korea's official *Rodong Sinmun*, U.S. strategic flexibility is the U.S. imperialists' theory for seeking domination over the Korean Peninsula and the rest of Asia.¹²¹ The DPRK Foreign Ministry also announced that the strategic flexibility policy will turn South Korea into an outpost and a logistics base serving the United States' Asia strategy and it will let the United States closely coordinate operations of its forces in Japan and South Korea.¹²²

The strategic flexibility policy of USFK is perceived to cause two major changes for North Korean security. First, by relocating the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division from near the DMZ further south, North Korea will lose its leverage on USFK. On one hand, the U.S. forces deployed near the DMZ served as a "tripwire," but on the other hand it also served as hostage to North Korea's 170mm and 240mm long range artillery weapons heavily deployed near the DMZ to prevent a preemptive attack by the United States.¹²³ To North Korea, removing these U.S. forces out of its artillery range reduces its leverage over the United States in case of a U.S. preemptive attack. Second, North Korea thinks that the relocation of the U.S. bases to the Osan-Pyungtaek area - where the Navy and Air

¹²¹ "Strategic Flexibility of U.S. Troops," *Rodong Sinmun*, March 12, 2006.

¹²² "Strategic Flexibility Aims for Strengthening U.S. Military Presence in Asia: DPRK Foreign Ministry," *The People's Korea*. February 21, 2006.

¹²³ It is well known that in 1994, Clinton administration finally decided not to launch a preemptive strike on a North Korean nuclear site because of the expected USFK casualties from North Korean artillery.

Force will be more emphasized - will increase U.S. overall strike capabilities.¹²⁴ North Korea closely watched the United States' use of high technology missile attack capability, particularly the U.S. Precision Guided Missile (PGM) strike capability, in its war in Iraq. Since then, a U.S. preemptive missile attack on its nuclear sites has become the most feared scenario in North Korea. Overall, North Korea perceives that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will greatly strengthen U.S. offensive potential toward North Korea by pulling out U.S. forces from near the DMZ and relocating them to the Osan-Pyungtaek area.¹²⁵

3. Japan

The Korean peninsula has been a long-standing interest for Japan's security, particularly in terms of its geographic proximity to Japan's home islands. It has been described as both a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan and a land-bridge to continental Asia. Japan's security policies, including the U.S.-Japan alliance, have been largely influenced by security changes in Korea.¹²⁶

As discussed in Chapter III, Japan has no reason to object to the strategic flexibility of USFK. Japan has been seeking to expand its roles and realms of security as well as to enlarge its influence in the region through the U.S.-Japan alliance. It is expected that through the realignment based on strategic flexibility, the USFK's role will become more similar to USFJ by carrying out regional missions. Japan and the United States have very similar perceptions of North Korea and China, and have already agreed on the extended role of USFJ in the region.¹²⁷ Japan has growing apprehension that China's broader regional ambitions may not be compatible with its own vision for Northeast Asia. Moreover, North Korea's nuclear weapons and long range missile

¹²⁴ On July 6, 2003, North Korea's Radio Pyongyang claimed that the redeployment of the 2nd Infantry Division was an attempt by the U.S. to position its forces to launch preemptive strikes on North Korea.

¹²⁵ Kun-Young Park, "A new U.S.-ROK Alliance: A Nine-Point Policy Recommendation for a Reflective and Mature Partnership," *The Brookings Institution CNAPS*, June 2005, 11. "... such flexibility may indicate to North Korea a transformation of strictly defensive forces into potentially 'offensive' one."

¹²⁶ For example, the current U.S. force structures in Japan were mostly established during the Korean War. Chang-Hee Nam and others, 447.

¹²⁷ Han, 6-7.

development is the greatest security threat to Japan. The United States and Japan are building a missile defense system through the realignment of USFJ, and it is recognized by Japan that the realignment of USFK will also contribute to the missile defense.

Moreover, maintaining a strong U.S.-ROK alliance serves Japan's primary security interests. First, although Japan perceives North Korea as an imminent military threat, Japan is reluctant to become involved in a potential war on the Korean peninsula. Japan would not prefer a withering of the U.S.-ROK alliance, which would shift more burden to Japan in case of a war in the peninsula. Therefore, the U.S.-ROK alliance remains important to Japan for maintaining stability in the Korean peninsula. Second, Japan does not want to remain the United States' only ally in case of a breakdown of the U.S.-ROK alliance.¹²⁸ There could be an increased domestic pressure upon Japanese government if it remains the only country in Asia maintaining a U.S. military presence on its soil. For example, if incidents like the Okinawa rape incident happen again, the Japanese people would question why they have to keep U.S. bases on their small country's territory, when no other countries in Asia do so. Therefore, as long as Japan wants to maintain a strong security relationship with the United States, it seems that Japan will also strongly support the U.S.-ROK alliance and its transformation as well.

In conclusion, each actor's different perceptions are significant to South Korea in analyzing the implications of strategic flexibility for its security. China's negative attitude toward U.S. strategic flexibility is important regarding South Korea's concern for its involvement in a potential Taiwan Strait conflict. China's and Japan's rather different perceptions on this issue support the argument that strategic flexibility could increase the possibility of an arms race in the region. Lastly, North Korea's strong opposition to strategic flexibility stemming from its concerns on relocating U.S. bases and increasing strike capabilities reflects that USFK's North Korean deterrence is still performing its function.

¹²⁸ As for the U.S. it would be more difficult alliance management proposition with the U.S.-Japan alliance without the U.S.-ROK alliance. Michael O'Hanlon, "The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: A New Alliance," *The Brookings Institution CNAPS 2005 Fall Forum*, Washington, DC, December 1, 2005.

B. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY AND SOUTH KOREAN SECURITY: FOUR CRITICAL ASPECTS

This section discusses the four critical aspects of U.S. strategic flexibility in South Korean security. These aspects have been the most debated issues in South Korea since the agreement on strategic flexibility in January 2006. Although they are distinguished for the purpose of analysis, all four aspects are closely related to each other and together will crucially influence South Korean security as well as the U.S.-ROK alliance. Based on these analyses – *how* strategic flexibility will influence South Korea’s security – South Korea’s policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy are examined in the next chapter.

1. U.S.-ROK Regional Security Alliance

In general, a large portion of the public and also many scholars in South Korea view the increasing USFK strategic flexibility policy as an automatic expansion of USFK’s roles and missions in the region. Accordingly, the USFK will no longer just stay in the peninsula to deter North Korea but will freely be deployed to other places in the region and even outside of the region to serve U.S. security interests.¹²⁹

As examined in Chapter II, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy is based on the U.S. global military strategy to utilize U.S. forces overseas more flexibly and efficiently. Indeed, the concept of strategic flexibility emphasizes enhancing the efficiency of U.S. forces operating overseas. Especially considering some of the USFK’s unchanged force structure and base locations since the end of the Korean War, it is apparent that the USFK realignment pursues efficiency.¹³⁰ However, it is hard to deny that seeking efficiency through building a new force structure in Korea – for example, relocating bases from congested commercial areas with small training spaces to areas with greater mobility and better training conditions – will eventually contribute to a regionally flexible force rather than a static force on the peninsula. In this context, transforming the U.S. force structure in Korea has more implications than just changing USFK to a regional force.

¹²⁹ Jang-Ryol Moon, “The Strategic Flexibility of USFK and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Military Cooperation Relation (Juhanmiguneu jeonlakjeok yuyeonsunggwa hanmi gunsaheopleokeu milae),” *Strategic Studies* 12, no. 2 (2005): 183. Jong-Chul Choi, “The Strategic Flexibility of USFK and South Korea’s Strategic Response (Juhanmiguneu jeonlakjeok yuyeonsunggwa hangukeu jeonlakjeok daeeng),” *National Strategy* 12, no. 1 (2006): 80.

¹³⁰ U.S. Congress, Congressional Budget Office, *Options for Changing the Army’s Overseas Basing* (Washington, DC, 2004): 3-4.

Transformation will not only expand the role of USFK but also expand the role of the alliance itself. By emphasizing the importance of enhancing the alliance relationship, the U.S. military transformation contains the idea of the alliance transformation.¹³¹ Through this transformation the U.S.-ROK alliance is likely to be transformed into a regional alliance possibly modeled on the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Since the end of the Cold War, the United States has fostered Japan's extended military role in the region. By gradually expanding the USFK's mission area, the United States will encourage the U.S.-ROK alliance to follow a path similar to the U.S.-Japan alliance. Moreover, there are close interrelations between the current U.S. transformation efforts in both South Korea and Japan. From the basic planning level the realignment of USFK and USFJ are linked together based on the broad U.S. regional security strategy. When the realignments are completed, it is possible that all the U.S. forces in the region will be integrated under a U.S. Northeast Asia or Asia Pacific Command Headquarters.¹³² In this context, it is possible that the United States will further emphasize the trilateral security cooperation between the three countries in order to enhance the interoperability of the USFK and USFJ.

Eventually, the regional U.S.-ROK alliance will demand an extended role for the ROK forces, as happened in Japan's case.¹³³ Through the USFK realignment, the ROK forces will take the leading role in the defense of South Korea while the USFK will remain only in a supporting role for the defense of South Korea in the peninsula.¹³⁴ Then the USFK will primarily focus on U.S. regional interests and will be prepared for conflicts outside the peninsula. Furthermore, if the tensions in the peninsula reduce as inter-Korean reconciliation develops, the United States could require the U.S.-ROK alliance to be able to expand in scope to include regional missions beyond the Korean peninsula.¹³⁵ In this case, it is possible to conceive that the ROK forces could be asked

¹³¹ Sam-Sung Lee, "Changes in U.S. Strategy for Its Forces in Korea and Rethinking the Mode of Our Alliance with the United States (Juhanmigun jeonlakeu byunhwawa hammidongmaeng yangsikeu jeonlakjeok jaegumto)," *Unification Policy Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 56.

¹³² Moon, 184.

¹³³ Sam-Sung Lee, 58.

¹³⁴ Cho, "The Realignment of USFK and the U.S.-ROK Alliance in Transition," 99, "Koreanization of South Korean Defense."

¹³⁵ Ibid., 154.

to support the USFK's regional military actions in the name of regional stability. Even now, ROK forces are already deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq supporting the U.S. troops partially under the command of the U.S. PACOM.¹³⁶ In sum, there are high possibilities that the strategic flexibility changes to USFK could transform the U.S.-ROK alliance into a regional alliance, and the ROK forces together with the USFK could be mobilized as a regional force under this future regional alliance.

2. Will Strategic Flexibility Weaken North Korean Deterrence?

One of the most debated issues regarding the strategic flexibility policy is the United States' deterrence capability toward North Korea. Many South Koreans are concerned that the strategic flexibility policy and the overall realignment of the USFK could eventually weaken its deterrence capabilities toward North Korea. However, it seems that there are more psychological perceptions than actual reduction of deterrence capabilities in those concerns.

There are good reasons for South Koreans to perceive that the USFK will have a diminished deterrence capability toward North Korea. Firstly, by implementing strategic flexibility it is apparent that the USFK's primary role will be changed from deterring North Korea to a regional purpose. Second, the USFK troops will be reduced to 25,000. Approximately a third of the total troops before the withdrawal, 12,500, will leave South Korea by the end of 2008. This withdrawal, initiated by redeploying the 2nd Infantry Division 2nd Regiment from Korea to Iraq and later to the U.S. homeland in 2004, is the largest troop reduction since the 1971 withdrawal of the 7th Division's 20,000 troops based on the Nixon Doctrine. Last, through the realignment, the 2nd Infantry Division deployed near the DMZ and serving as a "tripwire" since the end of the Korean War will be fully relocated to south of the Han River in the Osan-Pyungtaek area. By abandoning the role of "tripwire," which lasted for fifty years, it is largely believed in South Korea that the United States is disengaging from its defense commitment to South Korea.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Young-Dae, "The Issues with the USFK Strategic Flexibility (Juhanmiguneu jeonlakjeok yuyeonsung mooeoshi moonjeinga)," *Pyungtongsa*, May 11, 2005. http://www.spark946.org/bugsboard/index.php?BBS=pds_2&action=viewForm&uid=60&page=3 (Accessed October 21, 2006).

¹³⁷ Perry and others, 113. "America's announced plan to realign its footprint and to redeploy forces south of the Han River has been met with some resistance, due to fears that the transformation of the USFK might diminish its capacity to act as a 'tripwire' force."

However, it is naïve to conceive that reduction in the troop numbers will automatically weaken the overall capabilities of the force. If the number is that important, one can say that 12,500 U.S. troops is only one percent of the 1.2 million North Korean military. Depending on the numbers, whether it is 25,000 or 37,500 does not make a crucial difference in countering North Korea's one million strong military force. The USFK's deterrence toward North Korea mainly comes from its total presence and from the U.S. defense commitment, and less from actual troop numbers. When the Second Brigade of the Second Infantry Division, about 3,600 troops, dispatched to Iraq in 2004, many South Koreans worried that the move would seriously weaken the North Korean deterrence. However, it is difficult to prove that since then the USFK's North Korean deterrence capability has been weakened because 3,600 USFK troops left South Korea. Moreover, it is important to note that USFK's overall firepower seems to be unchanged. Although the ground force structure will be changed from a Division to a Brigade-level Unit of Action (UA), it is known that this UA will maintain the fire capability of the previous Division level. In order to counter North Korea's conventional forces, M1A1 Abrams tanks and M2A2 Bradley fighting vehicles will be still the main assets of the UA. Although the number of Apache helicopters will be reduced from 70 to 40, the older type AH-64 will be replaced with the more advanced AH-64D Apache Longbow Helicopters. Most of all, current USFK's counter-firing assets such as MLRS (Multiple Launch Rocket System) and counter-battery radars were excluded from withdrawal due to their importance for deterring North Korea.¹³⁸

U.S. officials disagree with the South Korean perception that the deterrence capability toward North Korea will be reduced. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and other high officials in the U.S. DOD repeatedly stressed regarding the GPR, "focus on capabilities, not numbers."¹³⁹ They confirmed that the U.S. deterrence capability toward North Korea will not be diminished by merely reducing troops in South Korea. One of their demonstrations of support for deterrence capability is the U.S. decision to

¹³⁸ Heo, 57-59.

¹³⁹ Kathleen T. Rhem, "Fewer Troops Won't Reduce Deterrence in South Korea, Rumsfeld Says," *DefenseLink News*, September 8, 2004.

invest \$11 billion to upgrade the capabilities of USFK during 2003-2006.¹⁴⁰ Although many South Koreans doubt the actual purpose and use of the U.S. \$11 billion investment in the USFK, it is hard to deny that it will increase overall capabilities of the USFK.¹⁴¹

Also, it is not convincing that abandoning the concept of a “tripwire” will decrease the U.S. defense commitment or automatically reduce its deterrence capability toward North Korea. Conversely, by relocating the bases to the rear of the DMZ and thus minimizing the potential loss from North Korean artillery and short range missiles heavily deployed near the DMZ, the survivability of USFK will be greatly increased. Moreover, relocating bases to the Osan-Pyungtaek area will also enhance the counter-strike capability of USFK in case of the North’s attack. It is evident that the next war in the peninsula will not be the same as the Korean War in 1950. Primarily, the USFK would not confront the North Korean army by forming long battle lines; rather, it will take strategic advantages based on its advanced force mobility and intelligence capability. This operational concept will require a network-centric expeditionary force with highly capable projection power from fighters and ships. In this context, the Osan-Pyungtaek area, which is nearby Osan Air Base, and the ROK 2nd Fleet in Pyungtaek harbor are perfect locations to carry out joint operations by a network-centric expeditionary force.¹⁴² Therefore, for U.S. policy makers, a more efficient deterrent capability could be provided

¹⁴⁰ It was first announced in the Joint Statement of the second meeting of the FOTA in June 2003. “The U.S. side presented a detailed explanation of its plan to invest in over 150 enhancements to the combined defense, valued at over \$11 billion, over the next four years.” Since the 2003 SCM Joint Statement, it has been repeatedly emphasized by U.S. high level officials, including the President Bush, whenever the reduction and the relocation of USFK became an issue between the two countries.

¹⁴¹ According to Chul-Kee Lee, “Strategic Flexibility of U.S. Forces in Korea,” the \$11 billion worth of USFK upgrading, which is intended to compensate for the reduction of the USFK and reinforce the capability of USFK, is mostly invested to deploy additional Patriot missiles and intelligence-gathering equipment. The United States is reinforcing its Patriot Missiles (PAC-3) at Osan air base and also deploying PAC-3 at Gunsan and Gwangu bases in the southern part of South Korea. Considering the geographical proximity to China, enhancing intelligence-gathering equipment and deploying PAC-3 missiles heavily in South Korea is regarded more as targeting China than North Korea. Overall, it is hard to say that these investments are solely intended to increase the United States’ deterrence capabilities toward North Korea. Hmm, interesting point. So why then do you concur that the 11b is overall helpful? How much of the \$ is going to things like this that aren’t really aimed at NK.

¹⁴² Jae-Jung Seo, “The Strategic Flexibility, Issues and Backgrounds (Jeonlakjeok Yuyeonsungeu baegyunggwae moonjejeom),” *KNSI Special Report* 5 (2004): 5.

by a greater reliance on lighter, more agile ground forces and advanced naval and air assets, as opposed to the comparatively static, heavy, and single-focused American ground force units traditionally deployed along the DMZ.¹⁴³

Most importantly, South Korea must understand that abandoning the tripwire concept did not come from the idea to reduce the USFK's North Korean deterrence capability; rather, it came from transforming the obsolete force structure into a more efficient and capable one. Since the end of the Cold War, the tripwire concept and forward positioning of U.S. forces near the DMZ has been largely viewed as technologically and strategically obsolete to the U.S. military planners. They view USFK's current configuration as an inefficient use of manpower and resources, especially since their deterrence and war-fighting capability are based on an "unbalanced capital-to-labor ratio" that did not adequately reflect advances in high-tech warfare.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, one cannot say that the United States would not respond to a North Korean reinvasion of the South and abandon South Korea because there are no more U.S. "tripwire" forces near the DMZ. In this case, what will happen to over 70,000 American civilians currently staying in Seoul if North Korea suddenly attacks the South? Abandoning a "tripwire" does not mean abandoning its ally and its defense commitment. As long as the U.S.-ROK alliance robustly remains based on the Mutual Security Treaty and the USFK stays, South Korea should not be excessively concerned about actual U.S. support in case of a war in Korea.¹⁴⁵

In sum, the realignment of USFK will not reduce its actual deterrence capabilities toward North Korea. Instead, some elements of the realignment could contribute to the deterrence capabilities in terms of increasing the efficiency of the USFK's overall force capability. The criticism is rather based on South Koreans' psychological anxieties stemming from troop reduction and relocating forward troops to the rear by abandoning the "tripwire," which was a long time symbol of the U.S. strong defense commitment to

¹⁴³ Perry and others. 164.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 164.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 164. "Neither do American policy makers accept the argument that realignment signals a reduced U.S. commitment to South Korea's defense, since the USFK would respond to a DPRK attack regardless of the number of U.S. troops stationed north of Seoul."

South Korea.¹⁴⁶ However, as the role of the USFK gradually changes to a regional purpose rather than North Korean deterrence, it is evident that the ROK forces should exert more effort and invest in more military resources to effectively deter the continuous military aggression from North Korea.

3. Involvement in a Potential U.S.-China Conflict in the Taiwan Strait

The core of the strategic flexibility debates in South Korea comes from its increasing security concerns that the USFK's regional deployment might bring about its unintended involvement in a regional conflict such as a potential U.S.-China military conflict in the Taiwan Strait. In spite of the Joint Statement article that, "the U.S. respects the ROK position that it shall not be involved in a regional conflict in Northeast Asia against the will of the Korean people,"¹⁴⁷ which is indeed very ambiguous, the fear of "entrapment"¹⁴⁸ is prevailing in South Korean society. To address this conclusion, it is true that strategic flexibility could bring about South Korea's unintended involvement to regional conflicts; however, more significantly it is the U.S.-ROK alliance itself, not the strategic flexibility alone that will cause this "entrapment."

There are two contending views within the debate about strategic flexibility bolstering involvement in regional conflicts. On one side, many Korean scholars argue - and also the majority of the Korean public believes - that the primary purpose of U.S. strategic flexibility is to utilize the USFK in case of a conflict with China in the Taiwan Strait. They believe that the USFK will certainly be mobilized in this case.¹⁴⁹ This group believes that the two hubs in Pyungtaek-Osan and Daegu-Busan where the USFK will be

¹⁴⁶ Seong-Pil Heo, "Short to Mid Term Military Preparation for the USFK Transformation (Juhanmigun byunhwae daehan danjungki gunsu daebi banghyang)," *National Defense Policy Research* (2004): 67.

¹⁴⁷ U.S.-ROK SCAP Joint Statement.

¹⁴⁸ Snyder defined the alliance's conflicts from different threat perception "alliance's security dilemma" and explained with the concept of "entrapment" and "abandonment." Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (New York: Cornell University, 1997), 180-199.

¹⁴⁹ Chul-Kee Lee, "Strategic Flexibility of the U.S. Forces in Korea," 3. "The main reason for Washington's pursuit of the strategic flexibility of the USFK is to prepare for a military action against China. In other words, the primary target of the strategic flexibility of the USFK is China. It's very certain that the USFK will be mobilized in case military conflicts occur in the Taiwan Strait between China and Taiwan."

relocated could serve the role of a U.S. forward outpost and supply base to contain China.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, they argue that the strategic flexibility of USFK will further enhance the U.S. capabilities to check China.¹⁵¹

The other group rejects this idea by saying that it is unnecessary to be concerned about involvement in a U.S.-China conflict in the Taiwan Strait since it has such a low possibility considering their current relationship. The current Chinese leaders under President Hu Jintao have consistently and will continue to focus on China's economic development, and thus will intentionally attempt to maintain strategic cooperation with the United States.¹⁵² U.S. cooperation is vital to China, especially to the success of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and 2010 Shanghai Expo. Therefore, this group argues that a military conflict between the U.S. and China in the Taiwan Strait and South Korean involvement because of the USFK's strategic flexibility originates from an overly pessimistic view of Northeast Asia's international politics.¹⁵³

Considering the characteristics of the strategic flexibility of USFK, regardless of the United States' intention, it is apparent that the U.S. capability to check China will increase. As the USFK is transformed to a rapidly deployable expeditionary force and begins to carry out its regional role, it is hard to deny the possibilities of its deployments to conflict areas in the region, particularly in the Taiwan Strait. Although in general the possibilities of military conflicts between the U.S. and China are low, it is also hard to exclude the worst case scenario such as Taiwan declaring independence due to the changing security environment in Northeast Asia. In case of a military conflict in the Taiwan Strait, the USFJ is more likely to be deployed before the USFK, considering

¹⁵⁰ Koh.

¹⁵¹ Cho, "The Realignment of USFK and the U.S.-ROK Alliance in Transition," 103. "QDR 2001 announced in September 2001, defined a new expected conflict area as the 'arc of instability,' which includes the Middle East, the Bengal Bay, and Southeast and Northeast Asia. At present, the U.S. is reallocating its military forces to focus on this region."

¹⁵² China is primarily focusing on its economic growth until the year of 2020, under the "Peaceful Rise (Peaceful Development)" policy.

¹⁵³ East Asia Institute, "Korean-American Alliance: A Roadmap (Hanmi dongmaengeu bijeongwa gwaje)," *EAI Research Project* (2006): 49.

geography and force structure.¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless, depending on the situation, there are certain possibilities in which the USFK or U.S. bases in Korea could be used.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, from a South Korean perspective, it is rational that the strategic flexibility of USFK could increase the ROK's "entrapment" in a potential United States conflict with China.

However, it is also important to consider that for the USFK, a largely Army force, to be put into the Taiwan Straits to support or to carry out U.S. military action means an almost full scale war with China.¹⁵⁶ Regardless of strategic flexibility, it will be impossible for South Korea to not become involved or remain neutral in the case of a full blown war between the United States and China.¹⁵⁷ That is, even without the strategic flexibility policy, the United States could and will use all of its forces stationed abroad, including the USFK, according to its national security interests. Moreover, South Korea must not forget that the U.S.-ROK alliance is based on the U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty which indicates that the U.S. and South Korea mutually have to support each other in case one of the parties' territory in the Pacific is under external attack.¹⁵⁸

In conclusion, there are some elements in Korean society convinced that the strategic flexibility could increase the risk of entrapment to South Korea. Nonetheless, it will be the U.S.-ROK alliance itself that would cause entrapment in case of a U.S.-China

¹⁵⁴ During the testimony titled, "Why the U.S. Forces/Korea Plan Makes Sense," before the House Armed Services Committee in June 15, 2004, Michael O'Hanlon stated "U.S. ground forces in Korea are not particularly useful for these contingencies. Problems in the Indonesia or Taiwan Strait would be much more likely to require naval power, airpower, or even expeditionary Marines than Army forces."

¹⁵⁵ Moon, 186.

¹⁵⁶ USFK also has two fighter wings mostly consisting of F-16s and A-10s, which are more designed to counter a North Korean attack.

¹⁵⁷ Won-Gon Park, "Evaluation on the U.S.-ROK Agreement on the Strategic Flexibility (hanmieu jeonlakjeok yuyeonsung hapeue daehan pyungga), *KIDA Northeast Asia Strategic Analysis*, February 23, 2006. Sang-Hyun Lee, "USFK's Strategic Flexibility Agreement (Juhammiguneu jeonlakjeok yuyeonsung hapeu)," *Sejong Institute Policy and Affairs*, February 2006.

¹⁵⁸ The U.S.-ROK Mutual Security Treaty Article 3: Each Party recognizes that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the Parties in territories now under their respective administrative control, or hereafter recognized by one of the Parties as lawfully brought under the administrative control of the other, would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes.

military conflict, not just the strategic flexibility policy. As long as the alliance relationship with the U.S. remains, it is part of the risk that South Korea must take regardless of the strategic flexibility policy.

4. Can Strategic Flexibility Cause an Arms Race?

The strategic flexibility of the USFK has more implications than just within the U.S.-ROK alliance and the peninsula. It also has a wider influence on the security environment in Northeast Asia.¹⁵⁹ Structurally, Northeast Asia is the one of the most heavily armed regions in the world, with many strong military states confronting each other in close proximity, including the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. Surrounded by China, Russia, and Japan, the peninsula is the geographic epicenter of Northeast Asia. A little change in the military posture on the peninsula could cause immediate and sensitive responses within the region. In this context, the changing role of the USFK from deterring North Korea to a regional purpose could cause negative impacts by increasing the arms race in the region.

The strategic flexibility of USFK contains a couple of factors that could cause a military buildup among the states in the region, especially in China and Japan but in others as well. First, with its strategic flexibility the United States is viewed as focusing more on the Navy and Air Force rather than the Army by relocating bases to the Osan-Pyungtaek area, which eventually could strengthen its force projection capability.¹⁶⁰ China and North Korea primarily but also Russia could view this U.S. enhanced projection capability as a potential threat. Secondly, it is also clear that the USFK, as well as USFJ, will be transformed to more efficient and highly capable forces with high technological weapons. These developments could facilitate the mentality of military competition in the region and subsequently bring about an arms race among the states.¹⁶¹ Lastly, the frequent in-and-out of the USFK could give the wrong signal, especially to

¹⁵⁹ Hang-Seok Jeong, “Backgrounds and Implication of the USFK Reduction (Juhanmigun Gamchukeu baegyunggwa eumi),” *Unification Policy Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 17.

¹⁶⁰ Although it seems that the USFK is enhancing Navy and Air Force but still the main force in USFK will be Army. Regional perceptions on enhancing Navy and Air Force stems from the new location of the bases rather than the actual increase in USFK’s Navy and Air Force capability. There are less known about the direct investments in Navy and Air Force through the realignment of USFK.

¹⁶¹ East Asia Institute, 33.

North Korea and but also to China when there is a high tension in the region. Such movement could be perceived as a planned exercise or even an actual attack targeting them.

Currently, the United States' and China's relationship is regarded as "strategic competitor." In this context, China is making more efforts to counter-balance the United States' increasing military pressure and as its investment in military modernization increases, it is likely to cause the same response from Japan to strengthen its military capabilities. In these circumstances, based on the three factors discussed above, there are possibilities that the U.S. strategic flexibility toward South Korea could contribute to developing a greater confrontational environment between the U.S.-Japan-ROK and China-Russia-DPRK, which some view as a "new Cold War" in Asia.¹⁶² It is obvious that during the last fifty years, the U.S.-ROK alliance based on the presence of the USFK contributed to regional stability by deterring a North Korean reinvasion of the South. Still, regional stability and peace is key to the U.S. forward military presence in the region. However, the regionalizing of the USFK with strengthened project capability and its frequent comings and goings from the peninsula could certainly create a new security environment with a high possibility of an arms race in the region. Therefore, the shift of USFK to a regional force could eventually cause permanent instability in the region, in contrast to the original purpose of the USFK.¹⁶³

C. GAPS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND SOUTH KOREA

Fundamentally, the debates and discords around strategic flexibility policy reflect the weaknesses of the U.S.-ROK alliance, which have gradually developed since the end of the Cold War. Many scholars and policy makers in both countries have pointed out various causes of the weaknesses and conflicts in the U.S.-ROK alliance.¹⁶⁴ Recently, the following two factors have surfaced. First, which is mostly discussed within the

¹⁶² Chul-Kee Lee, "The Realignment of USFK and Transforming U.S.-ROK Alliance (Juhanmigun jaebaechiwa hanmigdongmaengeu gaepyun banghyang)," *Unification Policy Studies* 13, no. 2 (2004): 90. Regarding China-Russia-North Korea's alliance against the U.S. hegemony, see Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

¹⁶³ Perry and others, 154. "To be sure, the current USFK realignment and the possible diversification of the alliance in the future must take into account regional perspectives. ... proposals to reshape the U.S.-ROK alliance for the future must contain strong elements of stability that alarm neither China nor Japan unnecessarily and avoid isolating one or both of them from any emerging regional security architecture."

¹⁶⁴ John Feffer, "American Apples, Korea Oranges," *FPIF Policy Report*, August 17, 2006.

alliance, is their perception gap about North Korea. As North Korea develops its nuclear weapons and at the same time inter-Korean relations improve, the United States and South Korea have struggled to narrow their wide perception gap and diverging policies on North Korea. The second factor is growing domestic anti-American sentiment in South Korea. As South Korea's economy grows and also its belief in self-reliant defense spreads, its asymmetrical relationship with the U.S. has become more and more unbearable to the people. A few events such as referees' unfair decision in favor of the United States in the 2002 Winter Olympics and the USFK training accidents killing two school girls in June 2002 accelerated the nationwide anti-American sentiment in South Korea.

However, it seems there are more fundamental factors causing the different perspectives on the strategic flexibility issue than just the North Korean perception gap and South Korea's anti-American sentiment. The alliance is based on common national interests. The presence of the USFK and its current transformation process thoroughly reflects the U.S. security policy based on its national interests. Strategic flexibility must be viewed in this regard. Accordingly, this paper discusses the following two factors as a main cause of both countries' different perspectives on the strategic flexibility of USFK: diverging perspectives on regional actors and differences in the alliance's rationales and visions.¹⁶⁵

1. Diverging Perspectives on Regional Actors

The first factor that causes the perception gap within the alliance is their diverging perspectives on the regional actors as well as regional security outlook.¹⁶⁶ This is beyond their conflicting perceptions on the North Korean nuclear issue. Details of the USFK realignment based on the strategic flexibility policy are intimately related to area security issues surrounding North Korea, China, and Japan. As long as both countries have different perspectives and different types of foreign policies toward the regional actors, it will be difficult to align their different ideas on strategic flexibility.

¹⁶⁵ Won-Soo Kim, "Challenges for the U.S.-ROK Alliance in the Twenty-First Century," in *The Future of America's Alliances in Northeast Asia* (Standford: Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2004), 164-166.

¹⁶⁶ East Asia Institute, 23.

a. North Korea

North Korea was the fundamental rationale for the U.S.-ROK alliance. The U.S.-ROK alliance consistently maintained the goal of deterring North Korea's reinvasion of South Korea. Even in the post-Cold War era, the main reason that the alliance could maintain its Cold War structure was the existence of the common threat perception of North Korea. Two major events have dramatically changed this common perception of the alliance.¹⁶⁷ Initiated by Kim Dae-Jung's Sunshine Policy, the 2000 Pyongyang Summit and other subsequent reconciliation processes¹⁶⁸ in the Korean peninsula abruptly changed South Korean perceptions of North Korea. South Korea, after fifty years of fear and antagonism, began to perceive North Korea more as an object for future reunification through cooperation and comprehension than the main enemy.¹⁶⁹ By contrast, since the September 11 terrorist attacks, the United States defined North Korea as a member of the 'axis of evil' with two other countries in the Middle East.¹⁷⁰ Now North Korea is not just a military threat in the Korean peninsula and an element of the instability in the region, it became a potential military threat to the continental United States with its nuclear weapons and missile development. Those two respective turning point events and subsequent developments clearly contributed to the beginning of the drift in the alliance.

Most recently, after the North Korean nuclear test on October 9, 2006, South Korea supported the U.S.-led U.N. resolution implementing further sanctions on North Korea.¹⁷¹ However, there are still conflicting issues between the two countries regarding North Korea. The U.S. wants South Korea to be an active participant in the U.S.-led Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and persuade its two key businesses,

¹⁶⁷ Don Oberdorfer, "The United States and South Korea: Can this Alliance Last?," *Nautilus Policy Forum Online* 05-93A (2005): 2.

¹⁶⁸ South Korea's efforts on Kumgang Mt. tourism and Kaesung Industrial complex are the best examples.

¹⁶⁹ Michael H. Armacost and Daniel I. Okimoto ed., *The Future of America's Alliances in Northeast Asia* (Stanford: Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2004), 18.

¹⁷⁰ The speech of 'Axis of Evil' was made by the president Bush during his state of the Union address on January 29, 2003. Over the years Bush has denounced Kim Jong Il as an untrustworthy madman, a 'pygmy,' and 'evildoer,' and he even said, "I loathe Kim Jong Il."

¹⁷¹ The U.N. Resolution 1718 was unanimously adopted by the members of the U.S. Security Council, condemning DPRK's nuclear test on October 14, 2006.

Kumgang Mountain Tourism and Gaesung Industrial Complex, to stop their associations with the North. South Korea's requests to the United States are to have direct talks with the North and unfreezing its financial sanctions on North Korea.

Therefore, it is certain that the United States and South Korea now have diverging policies toward North Korea. While both countries share overall interests regarding North Korea such as the elimination of nuclear programs, reduction of the military threat, and improvement of human rights, currently their way to achieve these goals are rather different. WMD and proliferation are most important to the United States while preventing another war and the eventual collapse of North Korea are the top priorities to South Korea.¹⁷² In the South Korean perspective, the military conflict in the peninsula could be initiated either by a U.S. preemptive missile strike on the North's nuclear sites, or a North Korean attack fearing a United States' preemptive strike.

b. China

The two allies have quite different perspectives and foreign policies toward China, too. Like North Korea, China was one of the main enemies of the U.S.-ROK alliance in the region. The United States and ROK fought against the PLA in the Korean War, and since then China has been North Korea's primary military ally. During the Vietnam War, the greatest concern of the United States was China's involvement in the war backing Vietnamese Communists. It was the United States which first changed its posture toward China in the early 1970s by reconciling relations and recognizing China instead of Taiwan. South Korea normalized its relationship with China and Russia in 1992 and 1993 under the "Northern Diplomacy."¹⁷³ Since then China has become one of the most influential actors in the Korean peninsula. Besides economic interdependence with China, there are a number of factors that South Korea could not neglect in its relationship with China.

China and Korea share cultural affiliation based on geographic closeness. Based on this close cultural background the two countries dramatically increased their political, economic and also social interchanges during the last decade. Moreover, China

¹⁷² Balbina Y. Hwang, "The U.S.-Korea Alliance on the Rocks: Shaken, Not Stirred," *Heritage Lectures* 940, September 27, 2006.

¹⁷³ South Korean President Roh Tae Woo claimed the "Northern Policy" and opened diplomatic and economic relationships with China and Russia in the early 1990s.

has a vital role in South Korea's foreign policy. China gives more leeway to South Korea in terms of dealing with U.S. unilateralism. Regarding Japan, South Korea can depend on China checking Japan's extreme rightists and its revival of militarism. Most of all, China has significance for South Korea's engagement with North Korea. China is the most influential country to North Korea in terms of economic aid and political support. China's influence on North Korea is crucial to South Korea's overall management of the North Korean issue.¹⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the United States perceives China differently. China is one of the major trading partners to the United States and its influence on North Korea also is viewed importantly in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue peacefully within the six-party talks. Nonetheless, China is perceived as a potential rival in the region expanding its influence to its neighbors. With its rapid economic growth and the size of the population and territory, China is considered the only country that can challenge the United States in the future. In this context, the United States' military intervention efforts in countries in the "arc of instability" in the name of counter-terrorism has been largely viewed as containing China. Building missile defense systems with Japan, in which South Korea did not participate, is also considered as a part of this containment.

c. Japan

The U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliances have served successfully as the two main pillars maintaining U.S. influence in the region. There had been many efforts from the United States to strengthen the security relationship among the three countries.¹⁷⁵ For a time preceding the beginning of the second North Korean nuclear crisis in 2002, through the process of Trilateral Cooperation on Oversight Group

¹⁷⁴ Armacost and Okimoto, 20. "China's pivotal Role in North Korea nuclear weapons control, in six party talks and other diplomacy...China became the principal broker of six-party talks, expand Sino-ROK relation economic cooperation, robust Sino ROK relationship gives South Korea wider diplomatic flexibility."

¹⁷⁵ Victor Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999). Victor Cha, Director for Asian Affairs in National Security Council, defined the relationship between South Korea and Japan as "quasi alliance," as both countries share a common alliance with the United States. They do not, however, have an alliance relationship with each other. He argued that the U.S.'s two alliances should develop into a tripartite alliance.

(TCOG), the form of trilateral alliance was discussed as the future of both alliances.¹⁷⁶ However, South Korea's concern about Japan's remilitarization based on historic antagonism and disbelief could not be overcome easily. Despite South Korea's close economic, political and social relationships with Japan, there are underlying differences between South Korea and the United States in terms of their security policies toward Japan.

There are many ongoing conflicting issues between South Korea and Japan. From South Korea's perspective, the distorted history textbooks, comfort women, and other various problems from Japan's harsh colonial legacy still remain unresolved. More recently, territorial disputes on Dokdo, and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi's frequent visits to the Yaskuni Shrine became hot issues deteriorating their relationship. Overall, many Koreans fear Japan's extreme rightists taking over political power, and remilitarizing Japan by starting to revise its Peace Constitution.

In this context, Koreans are deeply concerned about Japan's expanding role in international affairs based on the strong U.S.-Japan alliance. There are two specific reasons for South Korean concerns about strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance other than fearing its remilitarization. First, South Korea perceives that the increase in the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance in the United States' Asian security policy will eventually bring about a decrease in the importance of the U.S.-ROK alliance. The last thing that South Koreans want in the relationship with the United States is the U.S.-ROK alliance becoming subordinated to the U.S.-Japan alliance.¹⁷⁷ It is part of South Korea's abandonment fear stemming from perceiving the two alliances as a zero-sum relationship. Second, there are South Koreans' concerns about the potential regional power competition between Japan and China, as Japan expands its roles in the region under the name of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Korea's modern history has produced clear lessons of

¹⁷⁶ Under the initiative by William Perry, U.S. North Korea policy coordinator in 1999, the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) was formed by the U.S., South Korea, Japan as a diplomatic tool to resolve North Korea's nuclear program was formed and developed among the U.S., South Korea, and Japan.

¹⁷⁷ Chul-Kee Lee, "The Strategic Flexibility of U.S. Forces in Korea," 7.

the result of power competition surrounding the Korean peninsula. The current South Korean President Roh's "Balancer" policy clearly shows that South Korea desires not to suffer again by being a shrimp amongst the struggles of whales.¹⁷⁸

The U.S.-Japan alliance is considered a linchpin in U.S. Asian security policy. The importance of Japan in U.S. interests in the region and globally is well explained in the previous chapter, so there is no need to reemphasize it here. Unlike South Korea, Japan's taking more responsibility by expanding its roles in international affairs is crucial to the United States in terms of burden sharing and also checking China's expansion in the region. Therefore, when South Korea's perceptions of Japan as a source for regional instability and the United States' perception of Japan as a critical partner in checking China collide, it could seriously weaken the U.S.-ROK alliance.

Overall it is clear that the different perceptions of North Korea, China, and Japan create the fundamental gaps between the two countries' foreign policies including the strategic flexibility of USFK and further transformation in the alliance. Reducing these perception gaps will be the most urgent task for the alliance in order to successfully maintain the alliance in the future. However, this will not be an easy task. It is evident that the United States and South Korea share common values in democracy and free market economy, and also share common national interests in regional stability and peace in the peninsula. Nevertheless, as long as these different perceptions toward regional actors reflect each others' security interests and priorities, it will be difficult for the two countries to overcome their differences. Moreover, considering the peculiar circumstances surrounding the Korean peninsula – conflicting interests among powerful states, North and South confrontation, and South Korea's rather asymmetrical relationship with the United States – it is predictable that the United States and South Korea have these perception gaps.

Therefore, as long as maintaining and enhancing the U.S.-ROK alliance remains key national interests for both countries, the United States and South Korea must make efforts to acknowledge these different perceptions and perspectives held by the other. It is more beneficial for them to focus on similarities rather than differences.

¹⁷⁸ South Korean President Roh Moo Hyun first announced the "South Korea's role of balancer in Northeast Asia," during his 2nd annual inauguration ceremonial speech on February 25, 2005.

Fortunately, the United States and ROK have maintained a good policy cooperation framework as well as social economic ties – the recent economic cooperation on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) is a good example. In terms of security cooperation, both countries must develop their common interests within the strategic flexibility of USFK. Thus, South Korea must examine what common interests can be found within strategic flexibility, and the United States must recognize this common interest rather than highlighting negative aspects of this policy for South Korea. Examining the common interests in the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will be the core of South Korea’s policy options, which are further discussed in the next chapter.

2. Differences on Rationales and Visions of the Alliance

During the Cold War era, it was clear that the primary purpose of the U.S.-ROK alliance was to deter the North Korean threat. Although South Korea’s ultimate goal in the alliance was peace or more specifically the peaceful reunification of Korea and the United States’ goal was preventing the spread of Communism and maintaining regional stability, there was no difference between the two countries that strong deterrence of North Korea is the best way to achieve their respective goals. The end of the Cold War and subsequent changes in the security environment in Northeast Asia brought challenges to this common alliance rationale. Different perspectives toward the regional actors and different priorities in security policies also fostered this diverging rationale in the alliance.

Even before the transformation of the USFK, it was evident that the two countries were seeking rather different purposes through the alliance. Deterring North Korea from invading South Korea is not any longer the common alliance rationale to both countries. The U.S. rationale in the alliance has shifted from the peninsula to the region and to the globe, whereas South Korea prefers the alliance to be confined in the peninsula rather than expanded to the region.¹⁷⁹

Both countries’ divided perspectives on the North Korean nuclear issue exactly show this diverging alliance rationale. South Koreans recognize that North Korea’s conventional weapons are more of a threat to its security than the nuclear weapons. They

¹⁷⁹ Taik-Young Hamm, “The Self-Reliant National Defense of South Korea and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance,” *Nautilus Policy Forum Online* 06-49A (2006): 3.

do not think that North Korea will use the nuclear weapons to invade the South. For the United States, North Korea's conventional weapons are not considered as much of a threat since South Korea's military capabilities are recognized as much superior to the North's. Based on the global war on terror, the United States' primary interest is to prevent the proliferation of North Korea's nuclear weapons, and especially potential channels to terrorist organizations. Therefore, the worst scenario case to South Korea is a second Korean War on the peninsula, but to the United States it is another September 11 terrorist attack equipped with North Korea's WMD weapons.¹⁸⁰

In this context, the two countries also do not share the same vision about the U.S.-ROK alliance. For South Korea the first priority in the alliance is and will invariably be the security of the peninsula by maintaining strong deterrence toward North Korea. Although the threat perception of the North has been weakened during the last five years, there have been very little improvements on military confrontation between North and South.¹⁸¹ Moreover, many Koreans think that a U.S. presence is still essential to South Korean security for the time being.¹⁸² From a South Korean perspective the U.S.-ROK alliance must guarantee its security first and foremost as long as South Korea perceives a threat from North Korea. Expanding the role of the alliance to the region and also globally is second to deterring the North Korean threat.

The United States has rather different ideas about the vision of the alliance. The current transformation process reflects the broader roles of the alliance together with other alliances in the region. In order to confront new threats, such as transnational terrorism, the United States seems to want to form a broad security alliance beyond securing the territory of South Korea. The new alliance system, the coalition of the

¹⁸⁰ Won-Hyuk Lim, "Transforming an Asymmetric Cold War Alliance: Psychological and Strategic Challenges for South Korea and the United States," *Nautilus Policy Forum Online* 06-30A (2006): 4.

¹⁸¹ Although both North and South Koreas are working on reducing military tensions by establishing periodic military consultation organizations, there have been frequent small conflicts within the border area including the "West Sea engagement" on June 2002, between the two Navies.

¹⁸² Nae-Young Lee, "Polls on South Korea's Perception on U.S.-ROK Alliance (Hanmidongmaeng insik josa)," *East Asia Institute*, September 13, 2006. According to the polls, the 61 percent of South Koreans strongly supported the presence of the U.S. Forces in Korea.

<http://www.eai.or.kr/korean/project/mainscr/projectDBView.asp> (Accessed November 21, 2006).

willing nations, will take over the traditional fixed alliance in handling international crises.¹⁸³ From the U.S. perspective, ideally the U.S.-ROK alliance will be a part of a regional coalition with other bilateral alliances, such as with Japan and Australia.¹⁸⁴

In this context, it is significant to note that the United States and South Korea officially agreed upon working on the *Joint Study on the Vision of the ROK-U.S. Alliance on the Common Understanding of the Security Environment on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia*.¹⁸⁵ It is stated that the “Study determined that the future Alliance would contribute to peace and security on the Korean Peninsula, in the region, and globally.” This will be a timely opportunity to restore the trust between the two countries by building common understanding and confidence, as well as narrow gaps between South Korea’s focus on the peninsula alone and U.S. efforts to expand to the region and globally. Consequently, exploring the common interests of strategic flexibility will be one of the key issues in this study.

In conclusion, the two factors discussed above, diverging perspectives on regional actors and differences on the alliance’s rationale and vision, seem to be the most fundamental and critical factors contributing to the gaps between the two countries. Considering these two factors, the following chapter will examine the policy options for South Korea. South Korean policy options must take into account that the troubles regarding U.S. strategic flexibility within the two countries mainly stems from these two factors. In this context, how to cope with the strategic flexibility policy and changing role of USFK in light of enhancing the security of South Korea and also strengthening the alliance will be the key points in these policy options.

¹⁸³ Won-Soo Kim, 166.

¹⁸⁴ Perry and others, 67. “The ideal U.S.-ROK alliance for the U.S.”

¹⁸⁵ U.S.-ROK 38th SCM Joint Communiqué. 2006.

V. SOUTH KOREA'S POLICY OPTIONS TO U.S. STRATEGIC FLEXIBILITY

The previous chapters have shown how and why the U.S. strategic flexibility policy would change the security environment on the peninsula and also in Northeast Asia. In this context, South Korea's policy response toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will also be critical in shaping the future of the alliance as well as the security of South Korea. South Korea's policy options are evaluated in this chapter from four essential perspectives in its policy decision making. They are: the future U.S.-ROK alliance relationship; the inter-Korean relationship - deterrence to North Korea as well as reconciliation toward reunification; South Korea's self-reliant defense; and its relationship with regional actors, particularly with China and Japan.

However, at the outset, three difficulties with regard to determining South Korea's policy options must be noted. The first comes from the unpredictable future of the security environment within and surrounding South Korea. The Korean peninsula is the one of the places in the world full of uncertainties with high possibilities of a military conflict, which is continuously causing instability in the region. From a conventional war to the collapse of the North Korean regime, and from a permanent division of North and South to a peaceful reunification, every thinkable scenario is possible in the future of the peninsula. Moreover, the recent development of North Korea's missile and nuclear tests has deepened security uncertainties in the peninsula. Outside of the peninsula, a future contentious relationship between China and the United States or between China and Japan also could contribute to the uncertainty. Thus, South Korean policy options must take into account these unpredictable external variables in its future security.

The second difficulty comes from the internal policy dilemmas of the South Korean government. The South Korean government is under great criticism from its people for seeking both a self-reliant national defense and a strong alliance relationship

with the United States in the name of the “Cooperative Self-reliant Defense.”¹⁸⁶ The self-reliant defense capability, mainly against North Korea but also beyond North Korea, was a long time national goal for South Korea since Park’s government in the 1970s. For South Koreans, self-reliant defense is not just a matter of defending the country itself but is directly related to recovering full sovereignty of the state, replacing sixty years of an asymmetrical alliance relationship with the United States with a more symmetrical one.¹⁸⁷ It also reflects the growing nationalism in South Korea. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that realistically the U.S. military presence is and will continue to be essential to the security of South Korea.

Lastly, the inter-Korean relationship is a deeply complex matter. For South Korea, North Korea is a clear and present military threat that must be deterred for its own survival. Nonetheless, North Korea is also half of a future reunified Korea. In case of a war, South Korea must fight and win, but also in case of North Korea’s collapse, South Korea must endure all the burdens coming from the North. South Korea must consider the fact the North Korean regime is different from North Korean people. Neither scenario is appealing to South Korea. Ideally, the best scenario would be a gradual recovery of the North Korean economy at the same time as opening up its society by increasing interactions between the two Koreas, of course without radically changing the current Kim Jong-Il regime.¹⁸⁸ It seems almost impossible to envision this scenario under the current situation on the peninsula: North Korea’s reckless behavior developing nuclear weapons in spite of strong warnings from its powerful neighbors including the

¹⁸⁶ Under the Roh Administration the demands for a more balanced, or equal, alliance relationship with the United States have become stronger and ignited a domestic debate over *jaju* (self-reliance) vs. *dongmang* (alliance). In this context, the Roh government announced the promotion of “Cooperative Self-Reliant Defense” as one of the principles in its National Security Strategy. This document states, “The Participatory Government is pursuing a cooperative and self-reliant defense posture, which calls for the simultaneous development of the ROK-U.S. alliance and a self-reliant national defense, as a means of building a firm foundation for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.” ROK National Security Council, *Peace, Prosperity and National Security: National Security Strategy of the Republic of Korea* (Seoul, 2004), 26-27. Regarding South Korea’s asymmetrical relationship with U.S. see, James D. Morrow, “The U.S. and ROK Alliance: An Asymmetric Alliance over Time,” *The Korean Journal of Security Affairs* 11-1 (2006): 103-121.

¹⁸⁷ Taik-Young Hamm, “The Self-Reliant National Defense of South Korea and the Future U.S.-ROK Alliance,” *Seoul-Washington Forum*, May 1, 2006.

¹⁸⁸ This scenario is broadly based on South Korea’s Sunshine policy which has been recently heavily criticized by the South Korean public and also by the United States.

United States; discords between the U.S. and South Korean current governments' policies toward North Korea; and the deepening the isolation of North Korea in the international community under U.N. resolutions.

Taking these difficulties into account, and also considering the implications of U.S. strategic flexibility policy for the security of South Korea covered in the previous chapters, three policy options are nevertheless considered in this chapter. Each option is designed to have a different level of acceptance of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. South Korea's three policy options are:

1. Active support policy
2. Constraint policy
3. Status quo with strategic ambiguities.

These three policy options will be tested from the four essential perspectives in South Korean security listed above. However, first this chapter will begin by examining why these criteria are essential to South Korean policy and then demonstrate how each policy option works out within these criteria.

A. FOUR ESSENTIAL PERSPECTIVES IN SOUTH KOREAN POLICY DECISION MAKING

1. The U.S.-ROK Alliance

The fundamental question to be answered prior to examining the policy options must be, is the U.S.-ROK alliance still necessarily beneficial to South Korean security? There is no question that it has been a pivotal element in South Korean security during the last half century, but are there any better options for South Korea instead of the current form of the U.S.-ROK alliance in the near to mid-term future?¹⁸⁹ Above all, what are the alternatives to the strong U.S.-ROK alliance in South Korea? Some conceivable alternatives available to South Korea in case of U.S. disengagement are: take sides with China, which is a continental power; depend on a multi-lateral security system rather than a bilateral alliance; become a middle power state, possibly with nuclear weapons; declare the ROK's permanent neutral state within a nuclear free peninsula.

Most importantly, within these alternatives, the primary question for South Korea is which alternative could best serve its security, considering the number of factors

¹⁸⁹ For the purpose of analysis, the Korean reunification is not considered as a near to mid term future of the peninsula.

causing instabilities in the region, including the Korean peninsula itself. In case of military conflict in the Korean peninsula, although South Korea might successfully defend itself from the North's attack, the cost would be enormous without depending on its allies. Moreover, realistically, South Korea does not have the capability to become another powerful actor in the region, such as China, Japan, Russia and the United States, nor has it the capability to sufficiently balance among these powerful actors in the region. Therefore, under the current Northeast Asian geopolitical power distribution structure and its operating system, there seems to be no realistic alternatives for South Korea other than a strong bilateral alliance system. In terms of influence in the region and also sharing common values, such as democracy and free trade economy which has brought present prosperity to South Korea, it is necessary for South Korea to maximize the utility of its strong alliance relationship with the United States rather than seeking a new security partner.¹⁹⁰ Multi-lateral security cooperation seems to be very idealistic for South Korea, which is surrounded by some of the most powerful states in the world. Indeed, it is unrealistic to depend solely on a multi-lateral security organization for its security, especially in a region such as Northeast Asia.¹⁹¹ Above all, mainly due to the rise of China and Japan's aspiration to increase its influence in the region, multi-lateral security cooperation in the region seems unlikely in the near future. South Korea's desire to become a middle power, potentially with nuclear weapons, would also have critical negative implications for its security. It will not only dismantle the alliance relationship with the United States but also bring serious instability into the region by nuclear proliferation. This could cause even greater security risks to South Korea as long as the peninsula remains the most volatile and sensitive area into the region. Moreover, the status of "middle power" has less importance in the context of the geo-political position of South Korea, as it is surrounded by the most powerful states in the world. Lastly, declaring itself to be a neutral state under existing threat from North Korea without a sufficient deterrence capability could heavily undermine its security. All the options

¹⁹⁰ East Asia Institute, 37-38.

¹⁹¹ Chung-In Moon and Tae-Hwan Kim, "South Korea's International Relations: Challenges to Developmental Realism?" in *The International Relations of Northeast Asia* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003), 170-172.

could have some benefits in one way or another to South Korea, but none of those options could fully satisfy the security needs of South Korea as much as the current U.S.-ROK alliance does.

Therefore, considering the security needs of South Korea, the U.S.-ROK alliance is one of the most important criteria in its policy options regarding strategic flexibility. In this regards, South Korea's policy options must at least not undermine the security alliance with the United States, if it could not strengthen the alliance. Maintaining the security alliance relationship with the United States must be considered as a prerequisite as South Korea considers its policy options toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy.

2. Inter-Korean Relations

During the last sixty years since the division of the two Koreas, the top priority in South Korean security policy has been always dominated by the question, “how could North Korea be successfully deterred from reinvading South Korea?” Maintaining North Korean deterrence capability was the core of South Korean national security interest. Between the North and South military relationship, the most important factor is the deterrence capability rather than the defense capability.¹⁹² Considering the small size of the theater in the peninsula, successful defense cannot be regarded as a victory. In the case of North Korea's reinvasion, although the South would eventually defeat the North, it would not escape devastatingly massive destruction and damage from the war. That means not only North Korea but also South Korea will be losers in the war if deterrence fails.

In this context, for South Koreans, the U.S. strategic flexibility policy must not increase the security risk to South Korea by weakening its deterrence capability toward North Korea, and Seoul's policy response must confirm this. As previously discussed, although the USFK's actual deterrence capabilities to North Korea would not be weakened by the initial realignment process, there are possibilities that its changing role to a regional purpose could give the wrong signal to North Korea. Thus, South Korea's policy options must firmly ensure that North Korea should not misperceive the U.S.-ROK alliance's deterrence capabilities.

¹⁹² East Asia Institute, 29.

However, there is more than deterrence of North Korea that South Korean policy options should take into account within the inter-Korean relationship. South Korean security policy toward North Korea in the long term must contemplate the reconciliation of the two Koreas. In this context, the strategic flexibility of USFK contains several factors that could be interpreted as reducing military tensions in the peninsula as well as inducing reconciliation between the two Koreas.¹⁹³ Troop reduction and relocating forces from the forward to the rear area could be understood as efforts to mitigate tensions by removing possible military confrontation assets stationed near the DMZ. To some extent, the changing role of USFK from a fixed peninsula deterrence force to a flexible regional purpose could also be seen as a positive aspect to North Korea, as the primary purpose of USFK will be not focused on North Korea any longer. In fact, North Korea claimed for a long time that the U.S. force presence in South Korea is the major reason for instability on the peninsula, insisting that only the full withdrawal of USFK could bring peace to the peninsula.

In conclusion, South Korean policy options toward strategic flexibility must pay close attention to both deterrence and reconciliation elements in inter-Korean relations, and also should try to maintain a balance between them. Indeed, this will be much easier said than done. Managing North Korea's deterrence perception would be a critical factor in this regard. In many cases, the perception is as important as the actual capability in terms of deterrence. Through developing common interest in strategic flexibility with the United States as well as managing its public opinion, South Korea must firmly ensure that North Korea not misperceive its unchanged deterrence capability based on the robust U.S.-ROK military cooperation. At the same time, South Korea must confirm to North Korea that the U.S.-ROK alliance has no intention of attacking North Korea, as well as effectively communicate that the purpose of strategic flexibility is not enhancing ROK offensive capability toward North Korea.¹⁹⁴ In this regard, utilizing current high-level

¹⁹³ Tae-Hyo Kim, "The Realignment of USFK and the Future of U.S.-ROK Alliance (Juhanmigun jaebaechiwa hanmidongmanguei baljeonbanghyang)," *IFANS Policy Studies Series* 2004-6 (2004): 4.

¹⁹⁴ Terrence Hunt, "Bush says U.S. Won't Attack North Korea," *The Associated Press*, October 11, 2006

military talks¹⁹⁵ between the two Koreas could be a good start. Overall, maintaining a strong deterrence capability does not mean increasing military tensions; on the contrary, it could contribute to peace in the peninsula by reducing the possibility of a war. As long as North Korea remains a threat to South Korea, inter-Korean relations should be counted as a dominant factor to its security policy.

3. Self-Reliant Defense

A self-reliant defense is another critical factor in building South Korea's policy options. The notion of self-reliant defense is profoundly important to South Koreans. From the end of the 19th century until its independence in 1945, Korea was a prize to many powerful states exploiting the geopolitical advantage of the peninsula. Moreover, the Korean War taught a clear lesson to South Koreans about how severe dangers from the absence of self-reliant defense capability were. It was less than a year after the U.S. occupation troops had fully withdrawn from South Korea that North Korea invaded and took over most of South Korea in 1950. Without the U.S. decision to participate in the Korean War, South Korea would not have survived as an independent state. Since then, South Korea has relied heavily on the USFK to defend it and rendered the authority of command and control of ROK forces to the USFK commander. Eventually, this strong dependence on the U.S. security umbrella led to a deep sense of self-reliant defense as South Korea's economy has grown and defense capabilities have enhanced.

It is clear that throughout South Korea's history, the development of ROK forces was heavily influenced by the changes of the USFK.¹⁹⁶ For example, the first effort to achieve self-reliant defense was initiated by President Park in the early 1970s, only to fill the gap created by the U.S. troop reduction under the Nixon Doctrine in 1969. Based on the U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (CFC) established in 1978, the ROK force has been deeply relying upon the USFK, especially in USFK's counter-firing and intelligence gathering assets.

¹⁹⁵ North and South Korean military representatives have been holding high level military talks - including the defense minister - since 2000. Recently, there was a working-level military meeting on October 2, 2006. It is noted that both parties had difficulties reaching an agreement on various military issues. "Two Koreas Meet for Snap Military Talks," *Chosunilbo*, October 2, 2006.

¹⁹⁶ U.S. DOD, *2000 Report to Congress: Military Situation in the Korean Peninsula* (Washington, DC: 2000), 3. "From the beginning ROK military is organized, equipped, and trained to defeat a DPRK attack as part of a combined ROK/US defense, not defend by itself."

In this context, the South Korean Ministry of National Defense (MND) announced a Defense Reform Plan 2020 in September 2005.¹⁹⁷ Mainly, under the auspices of achieving a self-reliant defense capability, it is designed to modernize ROK military equipment and achieve a higher level of professional military personnel. In order to modernize equipment and construct an efficient joint force, the ROK military is trying to upgrade its forces with an advanced ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance) network and also a C4I (Command, Control, communications, Computing and Intelligence) infrastructure. Moreover, amplifying the war fighting effectiveness with Effect Based Operations (EBOs) and Network Centric Warfare (NCW), has been set as the primary goal in the ROK's defense transformation.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, it is obvious that the ROK's defense reform, especially in modernizing equipment, is modeled on the U.S. military transformation based on Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA).¹⁹⁹ The United States' support in transferring the technology, operation skills and actual military equipment will be crucial in this regard. That means it will be difficult for South Korea to achieve a self-reliant defense capability without support from the United States. Besides, the USFK's military transformation propelled South Korea to proactively embrace defense reform. ROK forces will take over all ten major missions from USFK by 2006, and should take over the role of the U.S. 2nd Infantry Division in DMZ on its completion of relocation. Recovering the wartime Operational Command and Control from CFC will become a turning point in the process of South Korea's defense reform. Eventually, it is hard to deny that a significant component of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will impel further self-reliance on ROK defense capabilities.

In short, South Korean policy options must bear in mind that both U.S. strategic flexibility and South Korea's Defense Reform are similarly based on the notion of "Koreanization of the South Korean defense." As for South Korea, and also for the U.S.-ROK alliance, it is crucial that there is a common interest between the two countries

¹⁹⁷ ROK Ministry of Defense, *Defense Reform 2020, the Way Ahead* (Seoul, 2005).

¹⁹⁸ Chang-hee Nam, "The Realignment of the USFK in the Military Transformation and South Korea's Defense Reform 2020," *NIDS International Symposium Report* (2006): 46.

¹⁹⁹ U.S. Office of Force Transformation, *The Implementation of Network-Centric Warfare* (Washington, DC: 2004).

regarding the strategic flexibility of USFK. The compatibility between South Korea's Defense Reform Plan and the strategic flexibility of USFK will be the primary issue in this regard. Consequently, South Korea's policy option choices must reflect that its policy toward the strategic flexibility of USFK could substantially influence its efforts to achieve self-reliant defense, which is what would be proved in retrospect.

4. Relationship with China and Japan

Lastly, South Korea's policy options must deliberately consider both China's and Japan's positions on the strategic flexibility of USFK. As discussed in Chapter IV, China and Japan possess rather different perspectives on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea. China worries that the U.S. strategic flexibility policy could increase U.S. influence in the region, especially on the Taiwan Strait issue. On the contrary, Japan sees the overall U.S. military transformation in the region as an opportunity to enhance its own defense capability and also expand the role of its Self-Defense Force throughout the region.

In this context, if South Korea's policy is seen to favor Japan, by actively supporting the U.S. strategic flexibility and integration with USFJ, it could negatively affect its relationship with China. China could perceive that U.S.-Japan-South Korea military cooperation is aiming China, particularly in Taiwan Strait contingency. Conversely, if South Korea's policy favors China by remaining reluctant about U.S. strategic flexibility and refusing further security cooperation with Japan, not only would South Korea's relationship with Japan worsen, but it is possible that the status of the U.S.-ROK alliance could be degraded to the point that the United States might consider an end to its security relationship with South Korea. In order to avoid either situation, South Korea's policy options must consider de-emphasizing the USFK's regional security role, which could stimulate China's security concerns with regard to the Taiwan Strait. Rather, encouraging USFK roles and missions beyond the region such as peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, as well as countering transnational threats globally, will be a better approach. In this way South Korea could also maintain a cooperative relationship with Japan.

The potential power competition and arms race between China and Japan are also significant factors in South Korea's policy options. As discussed in Chapter IV, the U.S.

strategic flexibility policy contains possibilities for a potential arms race in the region. It is likely that South Korea will be the principle victim in case of a power struggle between China and Japan.²⁰⁰ This seems unlikely for now however, if a Cold War type bipolar system between China-Russia-North Korea and U.S.-Japan-South Korea develops in Northeast Asia, the Korean peninsula will certainly become the main arena of competition between the two groups.

South Korea's relationship with China and also with Japan has been crucial to its security policies. Partial and imbalanced security policies favoring one side could bring about serious security risks to South Korea. Thus, as long as China and Japan maintain their rivalry relationship and also as long as the U.S. strategic flexibility policy keeps its strategy to check China with Japan, South Korea's policy options must try to balance relationships with China and Japan considering their positions on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy.

B. SOUTH KOREA'S POLICY OPTIONS

The strategic flexibility of USFK was agreed upon between South Korea and the United States during the SCAP meeting in January 2006, yet the pact left many unresolved obscurities. As discussed in Chapter II, even though it became a primary security issue between the two countries, there have been no further agreements regarding the details of strategic flexibility since then. The ROK NSC immediately announced after the agreement that based on the SCAP Joint Statement "South Korea will not be entangled in the conflicts in Northeast Asia against the will of the South Korean people because of the U.S. strategic flexibility."²⁰¹ However, with the obscurity in the term "respect" in the Joint Statement,²⁰² most South Koreans regard the agreement as South Korea's recognizing the U.S. strategic flexibility rather than having a guarantee

²⁰⁰ Since Japan became a regional power after its modernization in the late 19th century, the Korean peninsula became a prize in power competition between China and Japan. Korea was under Japanese colonization during the first half of the 20th century, after Japan defeated China in the Sino-Japanese war in 1894 and also Russia in the Russo-Japanese war in 1904. At the end of WWII, it was also divided into North and South Korea by other powerful states, the Soviet Union and the United States.

²⁰¹ ROK NSC, "Explanation on the U.S. Strategic Flexibility (Junlakjeok yuyeonseong sulmyung jaryo)," January 22, 2006.
http://www.president.go.kr/cwd/kr/archive/archive_view.php?meta_id=news_data&category=11&id=1c1e837bfd15ad1c833c799 (Accessed November 13, 2006).

²⁰² U.S.-ROK SCAP Joint Statement, "the U.S. respects the ROK position that it shall not be involved in a regional conflict in Northeast Asia against the will of the Korean people."

from the United States regarding South Korea's involvement in the Taiwan Strait. Thus, the South Korean government has been largely criticized by the public with regard to its diplomatic inability in the negotiations with the United States. Mainly due to this domestic political pressure, but also due to its sensitive regional implications, South Korea has not developed a clear policy response to U.S. strategic flexibility.

Given the relocation of the 2nd Infantry Division, and the period of transferring wartime Operational Command and Control,²⁰³ it is likely that until the completion of both relocation and command transfer, the USFK will not be generally used for regional purposes. Actual change in the role of USFK to a regional force is only expected after 2008, when the 2nd Infantry Division fully relocates to the Osan Pyungtaek area which is the phase II of the relocation.

Therefore, there is still some breathing room for South Korea to control the implications of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Different approaches to U.S. strategic flexibility will cause somewhat different results not only to the security of South Korea but also to the future of the U.S.-ROK alliance. Three policy options are suggested based on South Korea's level of acceptance of the strategic flexibility of USFK and they are assessed based on the four essential perspectives discussed above.

1. Active Support Policy

This policy basically suggests that not only does South Korea agree with the regional role of USFK, it will also actively support USFK's coming in and out of the peninsula without special regulations or limitation. Under the principle of "not risking the security of South Korea," USFK could be permitted to act rather freely with regards to its redeployments. South Korea would support the bases and logistics for the USFK performing regional roles. Eventually, ROK forces will take a primary role in the defense of South Korea, and the USFK will take a primary role in regional stability. Both forces will support each others' role as a secondary mission.

²⁰³ Phase I of relocating the 2nd Infantry Division, which is to consolidate the dispersed bases near DMZ to Camp Casey and Red Cloud, is to be completed by the end of 2008. Phase II, which is to move all the forces further south to the Osan-Pyungtaek area, will be decided between two countries at an appropriate time. The wartime Operational Command and Control is to be transferred to ROK forces from 2009-2012.

Several different implications of this policy will be considered based on the four criteria: effect of the alliance, on South Korea’s self-reliant defense, on the peninsula, and on the region.

The U.S.-ROK Alliance: Active support of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy implies that South Korea will be part of the future U.S. coalition of the willing in the Asia Pacific area. The U.S. military transformation will be accelerated and the alliance will be strengthened. Possibly, the alliance would be developed into a regional alliance as the USFK, supported by ROK forces, perform a regional role. It will be more likely to follow the path of the U.S.-Japan alliance. In this case, the U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty might be revised or replaced by new “Security Cooperation Guidelines.”²⁰⁴

Inter-Korean Relations: Based on the analysis in Chapter IV, actual deterrence capabilities toward North Korea would not be weakened even though the USFK abandons the role of “tripwire.” As long as North Korea perceives strategic flexibility as increasing the U.S. preemptive strike capability, South Korea’s active support of strategic flexibility could further worsen the inter-Korean relationship. However, regardless of strategic flexibility, as long as North Korea perceives the U.S.-ROK military cooperation as offensive, even minor U.S.-ROK security cooperation such as combined exercises or merely movement of forces in and out of the peninsula would be seen as an increasing threat to North Korea.

Self-Reliant Defense: Supporting U.S. strategic flexibility does not mean deepening the asymmetrical alliance relationship with the United States and abandoning self-reliant defense. It would more likely facilitate the process of South Korea’s self-reliant defense capability.²⁰⁵ As South Korea supports the regional role of the USFK, the United States will reciprocally support South Korea’s building a self-reliant defense capability. The United States’ support is critical to South Korea, especially to modernize its military equipment and upgrade its overall force structure under the Defense Reform 2020. Hopefully, with close cooperation between the United States and South Korea, by

²⁰⁴ Moon, 190.

²⁰⁵ Sang-Jo Jeon, “Transforming the U.S.-ROK Alliance,” *USAWC Strategy Research Project* (2006): 15.

the time ROK forces take over the wartime Operational Command and Control from USFK, which will be from 2009-2012, the first stage of the Defense Reform 2020 will also be fully implemented.

Relationships with China and Japan: South Korea's relationship with China will be the most troublesome factor within this policy. China will be uncomfortable with the USFK's regional missions together with the USFJ, together acting as a regional stabilizer. As previously discussed, China could view that the U.S.-Japan-South Korea's military cooperation is targeting China in case of a contingency in the Taiwan Strait. South Korea's relationship with Japan will become closer, as they both actively support and participate in the U.S. military transformation process. In this case, the possibility of a trilateral alliance among the U.S.-Japan-ROK is high.²⁰⁶ However, at the same time a potential arms race, mainly between China and Japan seeking regional hegemony, will increase resulting in a Cold War type bipolar system.

2. Constraint Policy

Due to the strong domestic political pressure stemming from the fear about future "entrapment" in the Taiwan Strait, and in order to limit USFK's role mainly to deter North Korea, the South Korean government could develop its efforts to limit and restrict the implementation of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. First of all, South Korea would try to establish a "prior consultation" system regarding the flow in and out of the USFK in order to constrain its movement. Through this system, South Korea could veto USFK's deployment to the regional conflict area by arguing that it could risk South Korean security, based on the principle that "strategic flexibility must not risk South Korean security by involving it in unwanted regional conflicts." Most of the regional contingencies are considered risking the security of South Korea, in order to further constrain the flow out of the USFK. Within this policy, it is considered that even though the realignment of the USFK is completed, South Korea will attempt to maintain the USFK's North Korean deterrence role by limiting its redeployment from the peninsula.

The U.S.-ROK Alliance: As South Korea attempts to maximize limitations on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy and tries to maintain the USFK's role as solely deterring

²⁰⁶ Regarding the trilateral security cooperation under U.S. military transformation, see, Chang-Hee Nam and others., 144-146. "Trilateral Security Cooperation in the Post-9/11 Context."

North Korea, the U.S. and ROK relationship will likely become worse. If South Korea strongly insists that the USFK remain as a force fixed on the peninsula instead of a regional force, the United States could view the U.S.-ROK alliance as an obstruction to its efficient utilization of its own military forces. Eventually the U.S.-ROK alliance could be seriously weakened, or in the worst case it could be dismantled.

Inter-Korean Relations: In the short term, deterrence to North Korea could be maintained with USFK remaining primarily a deterrence force. Nevertheless, as the U.S.-ROK alliance weakens or the USFK withdraws early due to confrontation over the strategic flexibility issue, it will be difficult to expect North Korean deterrence from USFK. Most likely, the weakened alliance with the United States could bring about a serious decrease not only in deterrence capability to North Korea but also to South Korea's overall defense capability. Besides, this could give the wrong signal to North Korea, as it did in 1950 after the announcement of Acheson Line, by initiating a massive military attack on the South. Some people in the radical left argue that the full withdrawal of USFK and subsequent breakup of the U.S.-ROK alliance could bring reconciliation and peace in the peninsula.²⁰⁷ However, as long as North Korea continues to maintain its "military first policy," inter-Korean reconciliation without a strong deterrence capability is an extremely risky a venture for South Korea.

Self-Reliant Defense: If South Korea attempts to constrain the strategic flexibility of USFK and the United States consequently decides to further reduce or fully withdraw its forces from Korea, this could—superficially—be seen as an accomplishment of self-reliant defense as South Korea would have finally gotten rid of its asymmetrical patron and client relationship with the United States. However, it is hard to conclude that South Korea actually possesses sufficient self-reliant defense capability, even though it seems that South Korea is defending itself with its own forces. Self-reliant defense does mean that South Korea could defend itself without the need of others' help. Nonetheless, it does not mean that South Korea should break up an already well-established alliance only to persist in defending itself with its own force, especially when its own defense

²⁰⁷ A number of peace and reunification related civil groups such as Peace Network, Pyungtongsa, Peace and Reunification Research, in South Korea argue the withdrawal of the USFK is the first step to reunify two Koreas.

capability is not enough to deter the current threat.²⁰⁸ Furthermore, in the longer term, modernization of South Korea's military under the current Defense Reform Plan relies heavily on United States support, and in many ways it is designed to go along with the U.S. forces realignment in Korea. Hence, as South Korea tries to maximize limitations on the U.S. strategic flexibility policy, establishing self-reliant defense based on the Defense Reform 2020 would also be constrained as it would be difficult to expect active support from the United States. Constraining U.S. strategic flexibility will not contribute to South Korea's self-reliant defense.

Relationships with China and Japan: In the short to mid-term China could view South Korea's independent behavior from the United States as an opportunity to further expand its influence on the peninsula. South Korea could seek more security cooperation with China in terms of dissuading North Korea. Thus, the close cooperative relationship in economy and also in North Korean policy will likely be the common interests of both countries. However, in the long term, if the weakened U.S.-ROK alliance leads to constant instability on the peninsula due to North Korea's provocative behavior, China would not prefer the consequences. It would be better for China to maintain close economic and political relationships with both Koreas and stability in the peninsula under the U.S.-ROK alliance, rather than constant instabilities or in the worst case a war in the peninsula without the U.S.-ROK alliance. Apparently, Japan will not prefer South Korea's being independent from the United States by limiting and refusing strategic flexibility. South Korea's policy could severely affect Japan's security relationship with the United States. As South Korea's relationship with the United States withered, Japan could fear the situation of "singularization" that it could be the only U.S. ally remaining

²⁰⁸ Du-Hyun Cha, "The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Toward the Evolution of a Strategic Cooperation Alliance," *The KIDA Papers*, no. 7 (2004): 11.

in Northeast Asia.²⁰⁹ Moreover, as the U.S.-ROK alliance loses its vitality, by losing the United States as broker, the relationship between South Korea and Japan could rapidly deteriorate.

3. Status Quo with Strategic Ambiguities

The South Korean government officially announced last January that some ambiguities are purposely left within the agreement of the U.S. strategic flexibility.²¹⁰ It is explained by the South Korean NSC that considering the current security environment of the Korean peninsula in Northeast Asia, it is impossible to establish detailed procedures for all possible scenarios regarding this issue. Moreover, with uncertainties in the future, agreement on the principles without the details could render a more flexible and pertinent response to any situation. Therefore, as long as both countries understand and respect each others' priorities within the strategic flexibility policy of USFK, whenever a situation happens both will closely cooperate to seek a solution. Under this approach, South Korea's policy would contain some deliberate ambiguities about U.S. strategic flexibility. With neither active support nor maximized constraints on strategic flexibility, this policy will seek to maintain the status quo and take chances as situation surrounding this issue develops.

The U.S.-ROK alliance: With this South Korean status quo policy the U.S.-ROK alliance will neither be strengthened nor weakened dramatically but will simply be maintained. To some extent, it may be better to leave the issue with some ambiguities than to painfully negotiate the details which might lead to more rift in the alliance.²¹¹ However, as the U.S. realignment process in Korea concludes, this status quo policy with

²⁰⁹ “The decay of the U.S.-South Korea alliance is also possible. As the United States and South Korea have diverging opinions on how to treat North Korea, it could possibly compromise the coherent U.S. Northeast Asia policy established half a century ago, based on the alliances with Japan and South Korea. This could lead to the “singularization” of Japan as the only reliable U.S. ally in the region, which could make Japan uneasy.” Yoichi Funabashi, “China’s New Thinking on North Korea Policy,” *Social Science Research Council*, July 12, 2005, <http://northkorea.ssrc.org/Funabashi/> (Accessed on November 13, 2006).

²¹⁰ ROK NSC, “Explanation on the U.S. Strategic Flexibility,” January 22, 2006.

²¹¹ Geun Lee. “USFK’s Strategic Flexibility and Korea’s National Interests,” *The JoonAng Ilbo*, May 19, 2005.

strategic ambiguities will become more problematic. It could bring about unexpected consequences which could cause fatal harm to the U.S.-ROK alliance in case of a sudden military conflict in the region.

Inter-Korean relations: There will be not much change in deterrence capability toward North Korea. Whether South Korea actively supports the strategic flexibility or just maintains the status quo, with the agreement between two countries hitherto, the USFK will be transformed to a regional force in any case. As discussed before, transformation will cause minor changes in actual deterrence capability toward North Korea. This status quo policy will not directly contribute to reconciliation with North Korea, yet it will have fewer negative effects on inter-Korean relations than the active support policy. Having ambiguities, South Korea could have more breathing room to deal with North Korea in terms of how the strategic flexibility of USFK will work in the peninsula.

Self-reliant defense: Maintaining a status quo policy toward U.S. strategic flexibility seems to have less impact on South Korea's search for self-reliant defense. Nevertheless, as previously discussed, South Korea's achieving self-reliant defense is closely related with the USFK's transformation process. For South Korea, support from the United States is necessary to successfully implement the Defense Reform Plan, particularly in terms of modernizing equipment and force structure. In this respect, it will be difficult for South Korea to expect full support from the United States as long as it remains ambiguous about the U.S. strategic flexibility policy. Therefore, this policy would contribute less to South Korea's achieving self-reliant defense capability with the United States' cooperation than the active support policy.

Relationships with China and Japan: In terms of not stimulating China's security concerns as much as the first policy option and also not increasing Japan's concerns about "singularization," in the short term this status quo policy could contribute to South Korea's security interests. This policy could remain effective if South Korea is able to develop a strong internal alliance relationship with the United States based on mutual trust and confidence. Otherwise, in the long term it will be difficult for South Korea to maintain this status quo policy. Due to current discord on the strategic flexibility issue,

by the time that the USFK's realignment is completed, and when USFK, along side the USFJ, begins to intervene in regional conflicts, this will definitely cause tensions with China. Therefore, while, in the short run, this policy might help in maintaining South Korea's relationships with both China and Japan without provoking either one, in the long run it will cause the same issues with China as the active support policy option.

South Korea's three policy options for responding to U.S. strategic flexibility are summarized through the following tables. Table 1 summarizes the implications of the three policy options. According to the four essential perspectives, each policy option will have either more positive or more negative implications for South Korean security. Based on these implications, Table 2 shows South Korea's policy preference for each criterion. Each criterion shows different policy preferences depending on the implications for South Korean security.

	Active Support	Constraint	Status Quo
U.S.-ROK Alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strengthen alliance - possibly develop to regional alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - weaken alliance - in worst case could cause collapse of alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in short term, could maintain alliance - but in long term, might bring crisis in alliance
Inter-Korean Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain deterrence capability - possibly worsen the relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in short term, maintain deterrence - but in long term, could seriously weaken deterrence - no contribution in reconciliation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - maintain deterrence capability - more chances to improve relationship
Self-Reliant Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contribute to self-reliant defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - negative impact to self-reliant defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - less contribution to self-reliant defense than active support policy
Relationship with China and Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China: worsen - Japan: improve - possibly cause arms race in the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China: in short to mid-term improve, but in long term uncertain - Japan: worsen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - China/Japan: in short term could maintain current relations, in long term similar results to active support policy

Table 1. South Korea's Policy Options and Implications

	South Korea's Preferred Policy
U.S.-ROK Alliance	Active Support > Status Quo > Constraint
Inter-Korean Relations	Status Quo > Active Support > Constraint
Self-Reliant Defense	Active Support > Status Quo > Constraint
Relationship with China and Japan	Status Quo > Constraint > Active Support

Table 2. South Korea's Policy Preferences

C. POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Based on the evaluation of the four essential elements for each policy option, each of the three options have benefits but also shortcomings. By choosing a policy option, benefits must be maximized while shortcomings should be able to be compromised. Active support policy will be the best option to strengthen the alliance and at the same time to foster South Korea's self-reliant defense. However, it is better to pursue a status quo policy than an active support policy regarding inter-Korean relations and also the relationships with China and Japan. Maximizing the limitations to the U.S. strategic flexibility policy could improve the relationship with China, but other than that, it has a negative impact on the rest of the criteria.

Therefore, the policy recommendation for South Korea regarding the U.S. strategic flexibility is to pursue both a status quo and an active support policy. That is to say, in the short term, try to maintain the status quo policy but in the mid to long term seek an active support policy. South Korea should, more externally than internally, maintain the current strategic ambiguities toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy and try not to deteriorate inter-Korean relations, and avoid stimulating the security concerns of China. This will give more breathing space and put South Korea in an advantageous position to engage both North Korea and China with more flexible and favorable interpretations of strategic flexibility.

In this regard, South Korea should emphasize that reducing and removing the U.S. forces near the DMZ was exactly what North Koreans have been requesting for a

long time in terms of reducing tensions in the DMZ area.²¹² Besides, South Korea could stress that breaking away from a threat-based U.S.-ROK alliance could give a better chance for the two Koreas to engage actively in reconciliation. To China, South Korea must assure that it does not have interests in interfering in the Taiwan Strait issue by recognizing this issue strongly as China's own sovereignty issue.²¹³ Also, South Korea must support resolutions for peaceful diplomacy in case of disputes between China and Taiwan. Above all, it must emphasize that the existence of the U.S.-ROK alliance is not designed to threaten China but rather will continuously contribute to a peaceful and stable region.²¹⁴

The best way for this approach to succeed is to encourage the strategic flexibility policy to be more focused on transnational threats such as terrorism, piracy, natural disasters, and pandemic disease, rather than emphasizing the less feasible regional conflicts such as a potential Taiwan Strait conflict between the U.S. and China. Removing attention from regional contingencies to common global security issues will greatly reduce the negative aspects of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy toward South Korea.²¹⁵ South Korea could learn from Japan's case. It is known that as a part of the realignment, Japan is planning to establish a new headquarters of a Ground SDF Central Readiness Force Command in Zama by 2012, where the U.S. First Army Corp in Washington is scheduled to move. It is known that the Ground SDF Central Readiness Force will operate units for nation-wide mobile operations and special tasks in order to fight terrorism, guerrilla actions, and other emergencies. Similarly, South Korea could create "peace and stability forces"²¹⁶ which could perform international peace keeping

²¹² Chang-hee Nam, "Relocating USFK Bases: Background and Implications," *East Asian Review* 15, no. 3 (2003): 123. "... for North Korea, to reciprocate by deploying a part of its troops and artilleries 100 to 200km backward from the DMZ in the context of confidence building and arms control."

²¹³ Since normalizing its relationship with China in 1992, South Korea nullified its diplomatic relationship with Taiwan. South Korea, since then, has been maintaining its position on peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue under "One China" policy.

²¹⁴ Wu Xinbo, "The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: A Chinese Perspective," *The Brookings Institute CNAPS 2005 Fall Forum*, December 1, 2005.

²¹⁵ Kun-Young Park recommended that regarding strategic flexibility, the U.S. and South Korea should "... avoid the term 'regional' so as not to unnecessarily provoke China and other countries in the region...[by] use of concepts such as 'global security' and 'new threats' ..." Kun-Young Park, "A Future of U.S.-Korea Alliance: Toward a Mature Allied Partnership for Peace in Northeast Asia and Beyond," *Seoul-Washington Forum*, May 1, 2006.

²¹⁶ Jong-Chul Choi, 87.

activities and various crisis response activities together with USFK. Countering terrorism and managing low-intensity conflicts in and out of the peninsula will also be one of the main roles of this force. Furthermore, focusing on transnational threats also greatly conforms to the U.S. national security strategy which was reflected in the SCAP Joint Statement.²¹⁷

In the mid to long term and more internally than externally, South Korea should support the U.S. strategic flexibility policy in order to strengthen the alliance as well as to accelerate its own self-reliant defense. For South Korea, it is better to focus on the positive aspects of strategic flexibility than the negative since the agreement on strategic flexibility is already made and the transformation of USFK is already underway. South Korean leaders should stop trumpeting the differences between the United States and South Korea on this issue and should emphasize how it could serve their security interests. Moreover, considering the fact that there are no possible realistic alternatives to the U.S.-ROK alliance on its security, this attitude is much more beneficial to South Korea. Therefore, South Korea should take this opportunity to achieve a strong alliance with United States and self-reliant defense capability by actively supporting the U.S. military transformation together with implementing its Defense Reform Plan.

South Korean's reconsideration of strategic flexibility is necessary in this regards. The strategic flexibility plans and the realignment of the USFK must be considered as necessary not only for U.S. military transformation, but also for South Korea's self-reliant defense. Again both concepts simultaneously share the notion of the "Koreanization of South Korean defense." In addition, South Koreans must not forget that the relocation of the Yongsan garrison and closing down other U.S. bases in Korea was initiated at the request of South Korea in order to reduce burdens for local communities.

In conclusion, it is necessary for South Korea to maximize the strong points of both the recommended policies: however, it is equally important for South Korea not to neglect its efforts on minimizing the shortcomings. While pursuing an active support policy in the long term, it must be careful not to provoke North Korea and worsen the

²¹⁷ Cooperation and coordination on these transnational threats is also discussed as the main issue between the U.S. and ROK in the SCAP joint statement.

inter-Korean relationship. Also, it must take into account the security concerns of China regarding strategic flexibility by focusing on common global issue rather than regional security issues, and must pursue balanced approaches to China and Japan in order not to trigger an arms race in the region. At the same time, South Korea must recognize the possibility that a continuous status quo policy could bring about a crisis in the alliance by being unable to manage adequately the rapidly changing security environments surrounding the peninsula. Also, South Korea must carefully manage the strategic ambiguities in its short term status quo policy to avoid being misunderstood by the U.S. side as attempting to limit strategic flexibility, which could subsequently cause constraints on South Korea's seeking self-reliant defense. The only way to avoid these negative results from a status quo policy is to strengthen the alliance relationship with the United States internally. South Korea must maintain a close consultative and cooperative security relationship with the United States based on current frameworks such as the Security Policy Initiative (SPI)²¹⁸ and SCAP. Moreover, South Korea must make continuous efforts to enhance confidence and trust within the alliance: thus it could persuade the United States to more readily acknowledge South Korea's security difficulties regarding strategic flexibility.

²¹⁸ U.S.-ROK Security Policy Initiative (SPI) meetings deal with various ongoing security issues between the two countries. Heads of the meeting are the Deputy Minister for Policy of the ROK Defense Ministry and the U.S. Deputy under Secretary of Defense for Asia-Pacific Affairs.

VI. CONCLUSION

The current U.S.-ROK alliance is dominated by the North Korean nuclear weapons development issue. The United States and South Korea's perception gap is inevitable considering the nature of the North Korean nuclear issue in the current security environment. With the current policies of the both governments, it will be difficult to overcome the contemporary problems in the alliance as long as the U.S.-ROK alliance is perceived through the lens of the North Korean nuclear issue.²¹⁹ Conversely, both countries must strive to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue by strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance. They must bear in mind that the foundation of the U.S.-ROK alliance was from their common perception and cooperation against North Korean aggression. Therefore, within current status of the weakened alliance, it is hard to expect the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue through their mutually opposing North Korean policies. The United States must recognize that its hard-line policy toward North Korea is not only causing difficulties in the relationship between the United States and South Korea, but also increasing China's and Russia's influence in the region at the expense of its own influence.²²⁰ Also, South Korea must admit that there are limitations with its embracing North Korea's "Sunshine policy" and disregarding cooperation with the United States. In this context, the crucial factor in strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance is how both countries could overcome the perception gap generating from the alliance transformation process under the U.S. strategic flexibility policy.

Whether South Korea likes it or not, it is hard to deny that the strategic flexibility of USFK transforming its security relationship with the United States. Taking into account that strategic flexibility is based on the U.S. international security strategy and military transformation, changes in the USFK's status are inevitable regardless of South Korea's opposition. Moreover, it is unrealistic to simply oppose and try to disregard the U.S. strategic flexibility policy, which some Korean scholars and many civil groups insist upon doing because that policy is already agreed upon between the two countries and the

²¹⁹ Victor D. Cha, "Focus on the Future, Not the North," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2002): 91-107.

²²⁰ Won-Hyuk Lim, "Malign Neglect and Brinkmanship Strategy (aceujeok moosiwa byulanggeut jeonsool)" *Pressian Korean Peninsula Briefing* 12, July 5, 2006.

USFK's realignment is already underway. One of the fundamental problems in South Korean's perception of the U.S. strategic flexibility policy is that Koreans perceive this issue with too much of a political mind rather than a strategic mind. As it is discussed in Chapter II, the United States is approaching the strategic flexibility policy within its international security strategy: therefore, South Koreans must escape from the perspective that the transformation of USFK is stemming from the United States' political retaliation against South Korea's recent anti-American sentiments and their different policies toward North Korea.²²¹

In this context, it is important to reiterate the two most debated issues about the U.S. strategic flexibility policy examined in Chapter IV. First, regarding the issue of strategic flexibility weakening North Korean deterrence, South Korea must acknowledge that the transformation of USFK is not designed to weaken the current USFK deterrence capabilities toward the North Korean threat. Instead, the actual U.S. firepower capability seems to be unchanged, and based on the transformation, more agile ground forces and advanced naval and air assets could bring more efficient deterrence capability. Moreover, South Korea must understand that there are rather positive elements in the transformation such as: the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will facilitate the "Koreanization of the South Korean defense," thus boosting South Korea's efforts to secure future self-reliant North Korean deterrence capability. Therefore, because of its excessive concerns about the USFK's deterrence capabilities, South Korea must not make mistakes by either sending a wrong signal to North Korea about deterrence or stimulating the United States to withdraw its troops which could cause actual reduction in deterrence capability.

Second, regarding the issue of "entrapment," specifically South Korea's unintended involvement in a Taiwan Strait conflict, South Korea must change its perception that it is not stemming from the USFK's strategic flexibility but it is instead generating from South Korea's fundamental alliance relationship with the United States. South Korea must contemplate that the security risks from the "entrapment" scenario is the inevitable cost of maintaining an alliance relationship with the United States. One

²²¹ Kong-Dan Oh, "Misunderstandings about the Relocation of U.S. Bases in Korea," *Chosunilbo*, June 21, 2003.

must consider it as the price for the benefits of the alliance.²²² Certainly there are some security risks in strengthening the alliance relationship with the United States: however, South Korea must recognize that there are even further security risks if the alliance is seriously weakened or dismantled.²²³

In addition, the South Korean government must never neglect strategic flexibility's ripple effect, namely how the changing role of USFK to a more regional function and changing the U.S.-ROK alliance to regional security alliance could bring about shifts in the region. South Korea must make an effort to not deteriorate its current close economic cooperation with China: it can do this by remaining strategically ambiguous on U.S. strategic flexibility based on the status quo policy. Also, South Korea must acknowledge the importance of its relationship with Japan, as long as the United States underscores the U.S.-Japan alliance. Thus, current dynamics among the three countries should not be changed by degrading the U.S.-ROK alliance or subordinating it to the U.S.-Japan alliance. In this regard, one of the long term measures for South Korea to pursue in the region is developing the current six-party talks system into a regional multilateral security organization along with other current regional security dialogues, such as Asian Regional Forum (ARF), Northeast Asia Cooperation Dialogue (NEACD), and Council for Security Cooperation in Asia-Pacific (CSCAP). Based on participants' cooperation and efforts to reach peaceful resolution on the North Korean nuclear issue could be developed to further enhance regional security cooperation on other issues. Ideally, it could complement South Korea's current security assurance from the U.S.-ROK alliance and furthermore, in the long term, this regional security cooperation organization could serve as a primary security guarantee in the Korean peninsula.

However, until this regional security cooperation framework develops in the region, maintaining a strong U.S.-ROK alliance is in the key national interests of South Korea. Therefore, as part of transforming the U.S.-ROK alliance, South Korea must refer to the U.S.-Japan alliance case rather than the U.S.-Philippines case. The Philippines appears to be the most prominent failure case in transitioning alliances at the end of the

²²² Kun-Young Park, “A New U.S.-ROK Alliance: A Nine Point Policy Recommendation for A Reflective and Mutual Partnership,” 8. In the article Park argued that Seoul’s negative reaction to the U.S. strategic flexibility policy could be seen as South Korea’s desire to have a “unilateral beneficial alliance.”

²²³ Sang-Hyun Lee, 78.

Cold War. In contrast to Japan, the Philippines government undermined the strategic necessity of its relationship with the United States in the new security environment and by indolently dealing with its domestic anti-American sentiment, and it eventually failed to maintain the alliance relationship with the United States.²²⁴

South Korea must learn lessons from Japan's reaction to the U.S.-Japan alliance transformation. Although there are many different characteristics within the two alliances under different security priorities, they share the most important common principle which is that their alliance relationship with the United States is critical to their overall security. Therefore, Japan's reactions toward strategic transformation contain greater implications for South Korea. First and foremost, South Korea needs to develop a defense policy such as Japan's National Defense Policy Guidelines (NDPG) in 2004, which could clearly correspond to the U.S. Global Posture Review (GPR) process. Then with close cooperation and coordination, South Korea must make an effort to integrate this policy into the U.S. military transformation and induce a consensus within the alliance on this policy. Both sides' common security interests must be maximized within this process. In this context, as discussed previously in Chapter III, it is important to note that the new U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines in 1997 were crucial to enhance the U.S.-Japan security relationship, and eventually contributed to set the basis of alliance transformation. Although there are annual Security Consultative Meetings (SCM) and Military Consultative Meetings (MCM) between the U.S. and ROK, there is no "Defense Guidelines" between the two countries that could articulate security policies and defense cooperation in the alliance. Since the security environment is constantly changing, it is necessary to establish "Security Cooperation Guidelines" that reflect the principles of the security cooperation in the alliance, similar to the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines.

Overall, in this context South Korea's policy response toward the U.S. strategic flexibility policy will be vital to its security and also to the U.S.-ROK alliance. South Korea's policy should take into account the four essential elements discussed in Chapter V: the U.S.-ROK alliance; inter-Korean relations; self-reliant defense; and the relationship with China and Japan. The recommended policy, a combination of active

²²⁴ Tae-Hyo Kim, 35.

support and the status quo, must focus in the short term on how the strategic flexibility policy should not negatively influence inter-Korean relations and the China and Japan relationships. On the other hand, in the mid to long term, the policy must concentrate on strengthening the alliance relationship with the United States and also a developing a self-reliant defense capability.

Therefore, the one of the best ways to successfully implement this policy is to link the U.S. strategic flexibility policy to South Korea's self-reliant national defense policy which is based on the Defense Reform 2020. In many aspects, increasing the strategic flexibility of USFK is parallel to South Korea's efforts focusing on accomplishing self-reliant national defense. Under the objective of the "Koreanization of South Korean defense," they both pursue similar paths within the alliance transformation. Furthermore, focusing on South Korea's self-reliant defense has many more benefits than emphasizing U.S. strategic flexibility. In terms of South Korea's changing asymmetrical alliance relationship with the United States under the self-reliant defense policy, it could give more positive implications to inter-Korean relations as well as the Sino-ROK relationship. Accordingly, the United States should actively cooperate and coordinate with South Korea on its Defense Reform 2020 not only as an issue for South Korea's own security but also as a significant issue facing the alliance's transformation. In conclusion, the United States and South Korea must actively search for and develop the common elements in the U.S. strategic flexibility policy and South Korea's Defense Reform 2020. This issue must be dealt with on the two countries' security policy cooperation level, possibly during the next Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) or at least in the Military Consultative Meeting (MCM). Also, it must be regarded as the core issue and continuously discussed through the U.S.-ROK Strategic Cooperation in Allied Partnership (SCAP) meetings. Finally, there must be more research and analysis on the relationship between the U.S. strategic flexibility and South Korea's Defense Reform 2020, which will have significant implications in South Korea's security and also in the U.S.-ROK alliance.

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